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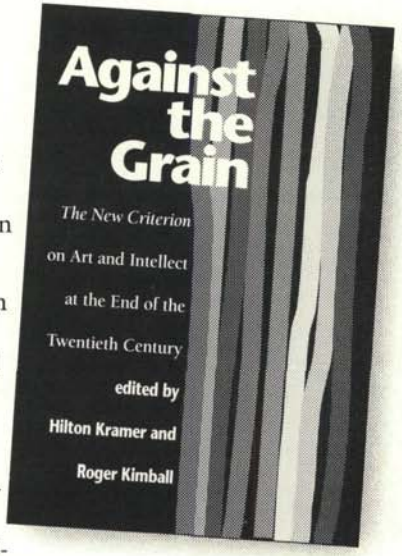

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Comment

I cannot disagree with Robert Boynton's lavish praise of the New York intellectuals in the *Atlantic Monthly* of March 1995. But his article, which compares the New York intellectuals with the new black intellectuals, raises some questions of fact and interpretation.

1. Boynton tries to draw a comparison between the New York intellectuals and the new black intellectuals that does not hold up. And though he admits there are differences, he keeps emphasizing the similarities. However, there is a basic difference. The New York intellectuals were not generally concerned with race and ethnic problems. They were writers and critics and social thinkers with large achievements mainly in their fields. To give only a few examples, Mary McCarthy was a novelist, Hannah Arendt a political philosopher, Sidney Hook a philosopher, Meyer Schapiro an art historian, Clement Greenberg an art and literary critic. The new black intellectuals have been, with few exceptions, almost exclusively occupied with questions of race and specifically with the relation of blacks to Americanism. This is not just a difference of subject matter. It is a difference of role and of the nature and importance of their intellectual contributions. In fact, many of the black intellectuals are not intellectuals in the same sense that the New York intellectuals were.

2. To maintain the symmetry of his argument, Boynton refers to the New York intellectuals as Jews – as compared with the blacks. But only some of the New York intellectuals were Jews, and they considered the question of their Jewishness mostly after the Holocaust, and not in relation to their Americanism. If the Jews among them thought about Americanization, it was chiefly in terms of their immigrant parents.

3. Boynton misreads the connection of the New York intellectuals to American culture. And he gives an ethnic twist to the famous symposium that appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1952, "Our Country and Our Culture." As the statement that was sent out for comment at that time indicated, we were making clear that we were no longer, as we had been as Marxists, separate from and hostile to our culture. But we still were critical, we maintained, of mass culture in this country.

4. Another important difference is the sympathetic interest in mass culture on the part of many of the new black intellectuals. Again, this is not simply a question of subject matter. It involves a totally opposite relation to various aspects of the culture and perhaps a different concept and definition of the intellectual.

5. The generally civilized tone of the piece is marred by Boynton's

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statement that Clement Greenberg's perfectly valid remark, about "the general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good and what is bad," is "brazen."

6. There is an unfortunate reference to the canon as the "WASP canon."

7. The cast of characters listed as being among the New York intellectuals is highly selective. Boynton does not mention Saul Bellow, Meyer Schapiro, Hilton Kramer, Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, Elizabeth Hardwick, Dwight Macdonald, Eleanor Clark, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, and others. Is it perhaps that they do not fit his categories?

8. Boynton does not discuss the neoconservatives who surely are, to use his term, public intellectuals. His bias negates his thesis, which is that the New York intellectuals have disappeared.

9. To maintain his argument that the New York "white" intellectuals are gone, Boynton cites Russell Jacoby's book, *The Last Intellectuals,* but he misreads Jacoby's thesis, which is, to be sure, muffled, that radical intellectuals have vanished.

10. It should be noted that a community of white intellectuals does exist. But it is dispersed, much of it now making up the contributors to *Partisan Review* and to the other intellectual journals on our side of the ideological spectrum.

11. Finally, Boynton confuses academics with intellectuals.

Commendations

Two excellent pieces appeared recently in *The New Republic:* one a brilliant and devastating review of Cornel West's books by Leon Wieseltier, the other an interesting review by Robert Alter of William Gass's new novel, *The Tunnel.*

W. P.

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JOSEPH BRODSKY

Wooing the Inanimate (Four Poems by Thomas Hardy)

I

A decade or so ago, a prominent English critic, reviewing in an American magazine a collection of poems by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, remarked that that poet's popularity in Britain, in its academic circles particularly, is indicative of the English public's stolid reading tastes, and that for all the prolonged physical presence of Messieurs Eliot and Pound on British soil, modernism never took root in England. The latter part of his remark (certainly not the former, since in that country – not to mention that milieu – where everyone wishes the other worse off, malice amounts to an insurance policy) got me interested, for it sounded both wistful and convincing.

Shortly afterward, I had the opportunity to meet that critic in person, and although one shouldn't talk shop at the dinner table, I asked him why he thinks modernism fared so poorly in his country. He replied that the generation of poets which could have wrought the decisive change was wiped out in the Great War. I found this answer a bit too mechanistic, considering the nature of the medium, too Marxist, if you will – subordinating literature too much to history. But then the man was a critic, and that's what critics do.

I thought that there must have been another explanation – if not for the fate of modernism on that side of the Atlantic, then for the apparent viability of formal verse there at the present time. Surely there are plenty of reasons for that, obvious enough to discard the issue altogether. The sheer pleasure of writing or reading a memorable line would be one; the purely linguistic logic of, and need for, meter and rhyme is another. But nowadays one's mind is conditioned to operate circuitously, and at the time, I thought only that a good rhyme is what in the end saves poetry from becoming a demographic phenomenon. At the time, my thoughts went to Thomas Hardy.

Perhaps I wasn't thinking so circuitously, after all, or at least not yet. Perhaps the expression "Great War" triggered something in my memory, and I remembered Thomas Hardy's "After two thousand years of Mass / We got as far as poison gas." In that case, my thinking was still straight. Or was it perhaps the term "modernism" that triggered those thoughts.

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In that case . . . A citizen of a democracy shouldn't be alarmed, of course, to find himself belonging to a minority; though he might get irritable. If a century can be compared to a political system, a significant portion of this one's cultural climate could well qualify as a tyranny: that of modernism. Or, to put it more accurately, of what sailed under that pennant. And perhaps my thoughts went to Hardy because at about that time – a decade ago – he habitually began to be billed as a "pre-modernist."

As definitions go, "pre-modernist" is a reasonably flattering one, since it implies that the so-defined has paved the road to our just and happy – stylistically speaking – times. The drawback, though, is that it pensions an author off squarely into the past, offering all the fringe benefits of scholarly interest, of course, but robbing him in effect of relevance. The past tense is his equivalent of a silver watch.

No orthodoxy, especially not a new one, is capable of honest hindsight, and modernism is no exception. While modernism itself presumably benefits from applying this epithet to Thomas Hardy, he, I am afraid, does not. In either case, this definition misleads, for Hardy's poetic output, I daresay, has not so much foreshadowed as overshot, and by an awfully wide margin at that, the development of modern poetry. Had T. S. Eliot, for instance, at the time he read Laforgue, read Thomas Hardy instead (as, I believe, Robert Frost did), the history of poetry in English in this century, or to say the least its present, might be somewhat more absorbing. For one thing, where Eliot needs a handful of dust to perceive terror, for Hardy, as he shows in "Shelley's Skylark," a pinch is enough.

II

All this no doubt sounds to you a touch too polemical. On top of that, you may wonder whom it is that the man in front of you is arguing with. True, the literature on Thomas Hardy the poet is fairly negligible. There are two or three full-length studies; they are essentially doctoral-dissertations-turned-books. There are also two or three biographies of the man, including one he penned himself, though it bears his wife's name on the cover. They are worth reading, especially the last if you believe – as I expect you do – that the artist's life holds the key for the understanding of his work. If you believe the opposite, you won't lose much by giving them a miss, since we are here to address his work.

I am arguing, I suppose, against seeing this poet through the prism of those who came in his stead. First, because, in most cases, those who came in his stead were operating in relative or absolute ignorance of Hardy the poet's existence – on this side of the Atlantic particularly. The

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very dearth of literature about Hardy the poet is both that ignorance's proof and its present echo. Second, because, on the whole, there is little point in reviewing the larger through the prism of the smaller, however vociferous and numerous; our discipline is not astronomy. Mainly, however, because the presence of Hardy the novelist impairs one's eyesight from the threshold, and no critic I know of can resist the temptation to hitch the prose writer to the poet, with the inevitable diminution of the poems as a consequence – if only because the critic's own medium isn't verse.

So to a critic, the prospect of dealing with Hardy's work should look quite messy. To begin with, if one's life holds the key to one's work, as received wisdom claims, then, in Hardy's case, the question is: Which work? Is this or that mishap reflected in this novel, or in that poem, and why not in both? And if a novel, what then is a poem for? And vice versa? Especially since there are about nine novels and roughly a thousand poems in his corpus. Which of these is, should you wax Freudian, a form of sublimation? And how come one keeps sublimating up to the ripe age of eighty-eight, for Hardy kept writing poems to the very end (his last, tenth collection came out posthumously)? And should one really draw a line between novelist and poet, or isn't it better to lump them together, echoing Mother Nature?

I say, let's separate them. At any rate, that's what we are going to do in this room. To make a long story short, a poet shouldn't be viewed through any prism other than that of his poems. Besides, technically speaking, Thomas Hardy was a novelist for twenty-six years only. And since he wrote poetry alongside his novels, one could argue that he was a poet for sixty years in a row. To say the least, for the last thirty years of his life; after *Jude the Obscure* – his last and, in my view, his greatest novel – received unfavorable notices, he quit fiction altogether and concentrated on poetry. That alone – the thirty years of verse writing – should be enough to qualify him for the status of a poet. After all, thirty years in this field is an average length for one's career, not to mention life.

So let's give Mother Nature short shrift. Let's deal with the poet's poems. Or, to put it differently, let's bear in mind that human artifice is as organic as any natural masterpiece, which, if we are to believe our naturalists, is also a product of tremendous selection. You see, there are roughly two ways of being natural in this world. One is to strip down to one's underthings, or beyond, and get exposed, as it were, to the elements. That would be, say, a Lawrentian approach, adopted in the second half of this century by many a scribbling dimwit – in our parts, I re-

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gret to inform you, especially. The other approach is best exemplified by the following four-liner, written by the great Russian poet Osip Mandelstam:

> Rome is but nature's twin, which has reflected Rome.
> We see its civic might, the signs of its decorum
> in the transparent air, the firmament's blue dome,
> the colonnades of groves and in the meadow's forum.

Mandelstam is a Russian, as I said. Yet this quatrain comes in handy because oddly enough it has more to do with Thomas Hardy than anything by D. H. Lawrence, a Brit.

Anyway, at the moment I'd like to go with you through several poems by Mr. Hardy, which by now I hope you have memorized. We'll go through them line by line, so that, apart from whetting your appetite for this poet, you'll be able to see the process of selection that occurs in the course of composition, and that echoes and – if you don't mind my saying so – outshines the similar process described in the *Origin of Species,* if only because the latter's net result is us, not Mr. Hardy's poems. So let me succumb to the perfectly Darwinian, logical as well as chronological temptation to address the poems belonging to the aforementioned thirty-year period, i.e., to the poems written by Thomas Hardy in the second part of his career, which also means in our century: this way, we leave the novelist behind.

III

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 and died in 1928. His father was a stonemason and could not afford to support him in a scholarly career, apprenticing him instead to a local church architect. He studied Greek and Latin classics on his own, however, and wrote in his off-hours until the success of *Far from the Madding Crowd* allowed him to quit the job at the age of thirty-four. Thus, his literary career, which started in 1871, allows itself to be fairly neatly divided into two almost even parts: into the Victorian and modern periods, since Queen Victoria conveniently dies in 1901. Bearing in mind that both terms are but catchwords, we'll nevertheless use them for reasons of economy, in order to save ourselves some breath. We shouldn't scrutinize the obvious; as regards our poet, the word "Victorian" catches in particular Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, George Meredith, both Rossettis, Charles Algernon Swinburne, Tennyson, of course, and, conceivably, Gerard Manley Hopkins and A.

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E. Housman. To these you might add Charles Darwin himself, Carlyle, Disraeli, John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, Samuel Butler, Walter Pater. But let's stop here: that should give you the general idea of the mental and stylistic parameters – or pressures – pertinent at the time for our poet. Let's leave Cardinal Newman out of it, because our man was a biological determinist and agnostic; let's also leave out the Brontë sisters, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Robert Louis Stevenson, and other fiction writers, because they mattered to Mr. Hardy when he was one of them but not, for instance, when he set out to write "The Darkling Thrush," which is our first poem.

I leant upon a coppice gate
  When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
  The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
  Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
  Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
  The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
  The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
  Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
  Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
  The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
  Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
  In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
  Upon the growing gloom.

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So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Now, although this thirty-two-line job is Thomas Hardy's most anthologized poem, it is not exactly the most typical of him, being extremely fluent. And that's why perhaps it's so frequently anthologized; although, save for one line in it, it could have been written by practically anyone of talent and, well, insight. These properties are not so rare in English poetry, at the turn of the century especially. It is a very fluent, very lucid poem; its texture is smooth and its structure is conservative enough to hark back to the ballad; its argument is clear and well sustained. In other words, there is very little here of vintage Hardy; and now is as good a time as any lying ahead to tell you what vintage Hardy is like.

Vintage Hardy is a poet who, according to his own admission, "abhorred the smooth line." That would sound perverse were it not for six centuries of verse writing predating his, and were it not for somebody like Tennyson breathing down his neck. Come to think of it, his attitude wasn't very dissimilar from that of Hopkins, and the ways they went about it were, I daresay, not that different, either. At any rate, Thomas Hardy is indeed by and large the poet of a very crammed, overstressed line, filled with clashing consonants, yawning vowels; of an extremely crabby syntax and awkward, cumbersome phrasing aggravated by his seemingly indiscriminate vocabulary; of eye/ear/mind-boggling stanzaic designs unprecedented in their never-repeating patterns.

So why push him on us, you may ask? Because all this was deliberate and, in the light of what transpired in the English poetry of the rest of this century, quite prophetic. To begin with, the intended awkwardness of Hardy's lines wasn't just the natural striving of a new poet toward a distinct diction, although it played that role, too. Nor should this roughness of surface be seen only as a rebellion against the tonal loftiness and polish of the post-Romantics. In fact, these properties of the post-Romantics are quite admirable, and the whole thesis that Hardy, or anyone else for that matter, "rebelled against" them should be taken with a grain of salt, if taken at all. I think there is another, more down-to-earth as well as more metaphysical explanation for Hardy's stylistic idiom,

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which in itself was both down-to-earth and metaphysical.

Well, metaphysics is always down-to-earth, isn't it? The more down-to-earth it is, the more metaphysical it gets, for the things of this world and their interplay are metaphysics's last frontier: they are the language in which matter manifests itself. And the syntax of this language is very crabby indeed. Be that as it may, what Hardy was really after in his verse was, I think, the effect of verisimilitude, the sense of veracity, or, if you will, of authenticity in his speech. The more awkward, he presumably thought, the more true it sounds. Or, at least, the less artful, the more true. Here, perhaps, we should recall that he was also a novelist – though I hope we bring this up for the last time. And novelists think of such things, don't they? Or let's put it a bit more dramatically: he was the kind of man who would think of such things and that's what made him a novelist. However, the man who became a novelist was, before and after that, a poet.

And here we come close to something crucial for our understanding of Hardy the poet; to our sense of what kind of man he was or, more exactly, what kind of mind he had. For the moment, I am afraid, you have to take my assessment for granted; but I hope that within the next half hour it will be borne out by his lines. So here we go: Thomas Hardy, I think, was an extraordinarily perceptive and cunning man. I say "cunning" here without negative connotations, but perhaps I should say "plotting." For he indeed plots his poems: not like novels, but precisely as poems. In other words, he knows from the threshold what a poem is, what it should be like; he has a certain idea of what his lines should add up to. Nearly every one of his works can be fairly neatly dissected into exposition/argument/denouement, not so much because they were actually structured that way as because structuring was instinctive to Hardy. It comes, as it were, from within the man and reflects not so much his familiarity with the contemporary poetic scene as – as is often the case with autodidacts – his reading of the Greek and Roman classics.

The strength of this structuring instinct in him also explains why Hardy never progressed as a stylist, why his manner never changed. Save for the subject matter, his early poems might sit very comfortably in his late collections, and vice versa, and he was rather cavalier with his dates and attributions. His strongest faculty, moreover, was not the ear but the eye, and the poems existed for him, I believe, more as printed than as spoken matter; had he read them aloud, he himself would have stumbled, but I doubt he would have felt embarrassed and attempted improvements. To put it differently, the real seat of poetry for him was in his mind. No matter how public some of his poems seem, they amount to mental pictures of public address rather than ask for actual delivery. Even

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the most lyrical of his pieces are essentially mental gestures toward what we know as lyricism in poetry, and they stick to paper more readily than they move your lips. It's hard to imagine Mr. Hardy mouthing his lines into a microphone; but then, I believe, microphones hadn't yet been invented.

So why push him on you, you may persist. Because precisely this voicelessness, this audial neutrality, if you will, and this predominance of the rational over emotional immediacy turn Hardy into a prophetic figure in English poetry: that's what its future liked. In an odd way, his poems have the feeling of being detached from themselves, of not so much being poems as maintaining the appearance of being poems. Herein lies a new aesthetics, an aesthetics insisting on art's conventions not for the sake of emphasis or self-assertion but the other way around: as a sort of camouflage, for better merging with the background against which art exists. Such aesthetics expand art's domain and allow it to land a better punch when and where it's least expected. This is where modernism goofed, but let's let bygones be bygones.

You shouldn't conclude, though, because of what I've told you, that Hardy is heady stuff. As a matter of fact, his verse is entirely devoid of any hermetic arcana. What's unique about him is, of course, his extraordinary appetite for the infinite, and it appears that, rather than hampering it, the constraints of convention only whet it more. But that's what constraints do to a normal, i.e., not self-centered, intelligence; and the infinite is poetry's standard turf. Other than that, Hardy the poet is a reasonably easy proposition; you don't need any special philosophical warm-up to appreciate him. You may even call him a realist, because his verse captures an enormous amount of the physical and psychological reality of the time he lived in, of what is loosely called Victorian England.

And yet you wouldn't call him Victorian. Far more than his actual chronology, the aforesaid appetite for the infinite makes him escape this and, for that matter, any definition save that of a poet. Of a man who's got to tell you something about your life no matter where and when he lived his. Except that with Hardy, when you say "poet" you see not a dashing raconteur or a tubercular youth feverishly scribbling in the haze and heat of inspiration but a clear-eyed, increasingly crusty man, bald and of medium height, with a mustache and an aquiline profile, carefully plotting his remorseless, if awkward lines upstairs in his studio, occasionally laughing at the achieved results.

I push him on you in no small part because of that laughter. To me, he casts a very modern figure, and not only because his lines contain a

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higher percentage of existential truth than his contemporaries', but because of these lines' unmistakable self-awareness. It is as though his poems say to you: Yes, we remember that we are artifacts, so we are not trying to seduce you with our truth; actually, we don't mind sounding a bit quaint. If nevertheless, boys and girls, you find this poet hard going, if his diction appears to you antiquated, keep in mind that the problem may be with you rather than with the author. There is no such thing as antiquated diction, there are only reduced vocabularies. That's why, for example, there is no Shakespeare nowadays on Broadway; apparently the modern audience has more trouble with the bard's diction than the folks at the Globe had. That's progress for you, then; and there is nothing sillier than retrospection from the point of view of progress. And now, off to "The Darkling Thrush."

IV

"The Darkling Thrush" is, of course, a turn-of-the-century poem. But suppose we didn't look at the date beneath it; suppose we opened a book and read it cold. People normally don't look at the dates beneath poems; on top of that, Hardy, as I said, wasn't all that systematic about dating his work. Imagine, then, reading it cold and catching the date only in the end. What would you say it's all about?

You'd say it's a nature poem, a description of a landscape. On a cold gray winter day a man strolls through a landscape, you would say; he stops and takes in the view. It's a picture of desolation enlivened by the sudden chirping of a bird, and that lifts his spirits. That's what you would say, and you would be right; moreover, that's what the author wants you to think; why, he practically insists on the ordinariness of the scene.

Why? Because he wants you eventually to learn that a new century, a new era – anything new – starts on a gray day, when your spirits are low and there is nothing eye-arresting in sight. That in the beginning there is a gray day, and not exactly a Word. (In about six years you'll be able to check whether or not he was right.) For a turn-of-the-century poem, "The Darkling Thrush" is remarkably unemphatic and devoid of millenarian hoopla. It is so much so that it almost argues against its own chronology; it makes you wonder whether the date wasn't put below the poem afterward, with the benefit of hindsight. And knowing him, one can easily imagine this, for the benefit of hindsight was Hardy's strong suit.

Be that as it may, let's go on with this nature poem, let's fall into his trap. It all starts with "coppice" in the first line. The precision in the naming of this particular type of growth calls the reader's – especially a

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modern one's – attention to itself, implying the centrality of natural phenomena to the speaker's mind as well as his affinity with them. It also creates an odd sense of security at the poem's opening, since a man familiar with the names of thickets, hedges, and plants can't, almost by definition, be fierce or, in any case, dangerous. That is, the voice we are hearing in the first line is that of nature's ally, and this nature, his diction implies, is by and large human-friendly. Besides, he is leaning on that coppice gate, and a leaning posture seldom bodes even mental aggression; if anything, it's rather receptive. Not to mention that the "coppice gate" itself suggests a nature reasonably civilized, accustomed, almost on its own accord, to human traffic.

The "spectre-gray" in the second line might perhaps put us on alert, were it not for the run-of-the-mill alternation of tetrameters with trimeters, with their balladlike, folk-tune echo, which plays down the ghostliness of "spectre" to the point that we hear "spectrum" more than "spectre," and our mind wanders to the realm of colors rather than homeless souls. What we get out of this line is the sense of controlled melancholy, all the more so since it establishes the poem's meter. "Gray," sitting here in the rhyming position, releases, as it were, the two *e*'s of "spectre" into a sort of exhaling sigh. What we hear is a wistful *eih,* which, together with the hyphen here, turns "shade" into a tint.

The next two lines, "And Winter's dregs made desolate / The weakening eye of day," clinch, in the same breathe, the quatrain pattern which is going to be sustained throughout this thirty-two-line poem and tell you, I am afraid, something about this poet's general view of humanity, or at least of its habitats. The distance between that weakening eye of day, which is presumably the sun, and those winter dregs make the latter hug, as it were, the ground and take on "Winter's" implied white or, as the case may be, gray color. I have the distinct feeling that our poet beholds here village dwellings, that we have here a view of a valley, harking back to the old trope of the human spectacle distressing the planets. The dregs, of course, are nothing but residue, what's left when the good stuff has been drunk out of the cup. On top of that, the "Winter's dregs" conjunction gives you a sense of a poet resolutely exiting Georgian diction and standing with both feet in the twentieth century.

Well, at least with one foot, as befits a poem written at the turn of the century. One of the additional pleasures of reading Hardy is observing the constant two-step of the contemporary (which is to say, traditional) and his own (which is to say, modern) diction. Rubbing these things against one another in a poem is how the future invades the pre-

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sent and, for that matter, the past to which the language has grown accustomed. In Hardy, this friction of stylistic tenses is palpable to the point of making you feel that he makes no meal of any, particularly his own, modern, stylistic mode. A really novel, breakthrough line can easily be followed by a succession of jobs so antiquated you may forget their antecedent altogether. Take, for instance, the second quatrain of the first stanza in "The Darkling Thrush":

> The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
> Like strings of broken lyres,
> And all mankind that haunted nigh
> Had sought their household fires.

The relatively advanced imagery of the first line (similar, in fact, to the opening passage in Frost's "Woodpile") quickly deteriorates here into a *fin-de-siècle* simile that even at the time of this poem's composition would have given off a stale air of pastiche. Why doesn't our poet strive here for fresher diction, why is he settling for obviously Victorian – even Wordsworthian – tropes, why doesn't he try to get ahead of his time – something he is clearly capable of?

First, because poetry is not a rat race yet. Second, because at the moment, the poem is at the stage of exposition. The exposition of a poem is the most peculiar part, since at this point poets by and large don't know which way the poem will go. Hence, expositions tend to be long, with English poets especially, and in the nineteenth century in particular. On the whole, on that side of the Atlantic, they have a greater set of references, while over here we've got to look mainly after ourselves. Add to this the pure pleasure of verse writing, of working all sorts of echoes into your texture, and you'll realize that the notion of somebody being "ahead of his time," for all its complimentary ring, is essentially the benefit of hindsight. In the second quatrain of the first stanza, Hardy is squarely behind his time, and he doesn't mind this in the least.

In fact, he loves it. The chief echo here is of the ballad, a term derived from *ballare,* to dance. This is one of the cornerstones of Hardy's poetics. Somebody should calculate the percentage of ballad-based meters in this poet's output; it may easily pass fifty. The explanation for this is not so much young Thomas Hardy's habit of playing the fiddle at country fairs as the English ballad's proclivity for gore and comeuppance, its inherent air of *danse macabre.* The chief attraction of ballad tunes is precisely their dancing – playful, if you insist – denomination, which pro-

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claims from the threshold its artifice. A ballad – and, by extension, a ballad-based meter – announces to the reader: Look, I am not entirely for real; and poetry is too old an art not to use this opportunity for displaying self-awareness. So the prevalence of this sort of tune, in other words, simply coincides – "overlaps" is a better verb – in Hardy with the agnostic's worldview, justifying along the way an old turn of phrase ("haunted nigh") or a trite rhyme ("lyres"/"fires"), except that "lyres" should alert us to the self-referential aspect of the poem.

And as that aspect goes, the next stanza is full of it. It is a fusion of exposition and statement of theme. The end of a century is presented here as the death of a man lying, as it were, in state. To appreciate this treatment better, we have to bear in mind Thomas Hardy's other trade: that of ecclesiastical architect. In that respect, he undertakes here something quite remarkable when he puts the corpse of time into the church of the elements. What makes this undertaking congenial to him in the first place is the fact that the century's sixty years are his own. In a sense, he owns both the edifice and a large portion of its contents. This dual affinity stems not only from the given landscape at the given season but also from his practiced self-deprecation, all the more convincing in a sixty-year-old.

> The ancient pulse of germ and birth
> Was shrunken hard and dry,
> And every spirit upon earth
> Seemed fervourless as I.

That he had some twenty-eight years to go (in the course of which, at the age of seventy-four, he remarried) is of no consequence, as he couldn't be aware of such a prospect. An inquisitive eye may even zero in on "shrunken" and perceive a euphemistic job in that "pulse of germ and birth." That would be both reductive and irrelevant, however, since the mental gesture of this quatrain is far grander and more resolute than any personal lament. It ends with "I," and the gaping caesura after "fervourless" gives this "as I" terrific singularity.

Now the exposition is over, and had the poem stopped here, we'd still have a good piece, the kind of sketch from nature with which the body of many a poet's work swells. For many poems, specifically those that have nature as their subject, are essentially extended expositions fallen short of their objective; sidetracked, as it were, by the pleasure of the attained texture.

Nothing of the sort ever happens in Hardy. He seems always to know what he is after, and pleasure for him is neither a principle nor a

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valid consideration in verse. He is not big on sonority and orchestrates his lines rather poorly, until it comes to the punch line of the poem, or to the main point the poem is trying to score. That's why his expositions are not particularly mellifluous; if they are – as is the case in "The Darkling Thrush" – it is more by fluke than by intent. With Hardy, the main adventure of a poem is always toward its end. By and large, he gives you the impression that verse for him is but the means of transportation, justified and perhaps even hallowed only by the poem's destination. His ear is seldom better than his eye, but both are inferior to his mind, which subordinates them to its purposes, at times harshly.

So what we've got by now is a picture of utter desolation, of a man and a landscape locked in their respective moribundity. The next stanza offers a key:

> At once a voice arose among
> The bleak twigs overhead
> In a full-hearted evensong
> Of joy illimited;
> An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small
> In blast-beruffled plume
> Had chosen thus to fling his soul
> Upon the growing gloom.

This is a treasure trove of a stanza for anyone interested in Hardy. Let's take its story line at face value and see what our poet is up to. He is up to showing you an exit out of the previous stanza's dead end. Dead ends can be exited only upward or by backing out. "Arose" and "overhead" tell you the route our poet chooses. He goes for a full-scale elevation here; in fact, for an epiphany, for a complete takeoff with clear-cut ecclesiastical connotations. But what is remarkable about this takeoff is the self-consciousness accompanying the lyrical release of "In a full-hearted evensong / Of joy illimited." This self-consciousness is apparent in the dactylic undercutting you detect in both "evensong" and "illimited": these words come to you prefaced by a caesura and as though exhaled; as though these lines that begin as assertions dissipate in his throat into qualifiers.

This reflects not so much the understandable difficulty an agnostic may have with ecclesiastical vocabulary as Hardy's true humility. In other words, the takeoff of belief is checked here by the gravity of the speaker's reservations as to his right to use these means of elevation. "An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small, / In blast-beruffed plume" is, of course, Hardy's self-portrait. Famous for his aquiline profile, with a tuft of hair

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hovering above his bald pate, he had indeed a birdlike appearance – in his old age especially, judging by the available photographs. ("Gaunt" is his pet word, a signature really, if only because it is so un-Georgian.)

At any rate, the bird here, in addition to behaving like a bard, has his visual characteristics also. This is our poet's ticket into its sentiments, which yields one of the greatest lines in English poetry of the twentieth century.

It turns out that an aged thrush of not particularly fetching appearance

> Had chosen thus to fling his soul
> Upon the growing gloom.

Speaking of choices, "fling" can't be beaten here. Given the implied visual similarity between bird and bard, this two-liner bespeaking a posture toward reality of the one does the same for another. And if one had to define the philosophy underlying this posture, one would end up no doubt oscillating madly between epicurianism and stoicism. Blissfully, for us terminology is not the most pressing issue. Far more pressing is the need to absorb this two-liner into our system, say, for the dark time of the year.

Had the poem stopped here, we would have an extraordinary piece of moral instruction; they are few and far between in poetry but they still do exist. Besides, the superiority of the animal kingdom (birds in particular) in poetry is taken for granted. In fact, the notion of that superiority is one of poetry's most distinctive trappings. What is quite remarkable about "The Darkling Thrush" is that the poet goes practically against this notion, which he himself has bought and is trying to resell in the process of the poem. What's more, by doing this, he almost goes against his most successful lines ever. What is he hoping for? What is he driven by?

Hard to tell, except that perhaps he does not recognize his own success, and what blinds him to it is his metaphysical appetite. Another explanation for why he goes for the fourth stanza here is that appetite's close relative: the sense of symmetry. Those who write formal verse will always prefer four eight-line stanzas to three, and we shouldn't forget the ecclesiastical architect in Hardy. Quatrains could be likened to euphonic building blocks. As such they tend to generate an order that is most satisfactory when it can be divided by four. The sixteen-line exposition naturally – for our poet's mind, ear, and eye – calls for at minimum the same number of lines for the rest.

To put it less idiosyncratically, the stanzaic pattern employed in a

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poem determines its length as much as – if not more than – its story line. "So little cause for carolings / Of such ecstatic sound" is no less a denouement than the euphonic imperative created by the preceding twenty-four lines, requiring resolution. A poem's length, in other words, is its breath. The first stanza inhales, the second exhales, the third stanza inhales . . . Guess what you need a fourth stanza for? To complete the cycle.

Remember that this is a poem about looking into the future. As such, it has to be balanced. Our man, poet though he is, is not a utopian; nor can he permit himself the posture of a prophet, or that of a visionary. The subject itself, by definition, is too pregnant with imprecision; so what's required of the poet here is sobriety, regardless of whether he is pessimistic or optimistic by temperament. Hence the absolutely remarkable linguistic content of the fourth stanza, with its fusion of legalese ("cause . . . Was written") with modernist detachment ("on terrestrial things") and the quaintly archaic ("Afar or nigh around").

"So little cause for carolings / Of such ecstatic sound / Was written on terrestrial things" betrays not so much the unique bloody-mindedness of our poet as his impartiality to any level of diction he resorts to in a poem. There is something frighteningly democratic in Hardy's whole approach to poetics, and it can be summed up as "so long as it works."

Note the elegiac opening of this stanza, all the more poignant in tone because of the "growing gloom" a line before. The pitch is still climbing up, we are still after an elevation, after an exit from our cul-de-sac. "So little cause" [caesura] "for carolings / Of such ecstatic" – caesura – "sound . . ." "Ecstatic" carries an exclamation, and so, after the caesura, does "sound."

Vocally, this is the highest point in the stanza; even "whereof he knew / And I was unaware" is several notes – notches – lower. And yet even at this highest point, the poet, we realize, holds his voice in check, because "carolings / Of such ecstatic sound" are what "a full-hearted evensong" comes down to; which is to say, the evaluation of the bird's voice has undergone a demotion, with ecclesiastical diction being supplanted, as it were, by lay parlance. And then comes this terrific "Was written on terrestrial things," whose detachment from any particularity bespeaks presumably the vantage point either of the "weakening eye of day" or, to say the least, of the bird itself, and that's why we have the archaic – which is to say, impersonal – "Afar or nigh around."

The unparticularity and impersonality, however, belong to neither, but rather to their fusion, the crucible being the poet's mind or, if you will, the language itself. Let's dwell on this extraordinary line – "Was written on terrestrial things" – a bit longer, for it crept into this turn-

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of-the-century poem out of where no poet had ever been before.

The conjunction "terrestrial things" suggests a detachment whose nature is not exactly human. The point of view attained here through the proximity of two abstract notions is, strictly speaking, inanimate. The only evidence of human manufacture is that it is indeed being "written"; and it gives you a sense that language is capable of arrangements that reduce a human being to, at best, the function of a scribe. That it is language that utilizes a human being, not the other way around. That language flows into the human domain from the realm of nonhuman truths and dependencies, that it is ultimately the voice of inanimate matter, and that poetry just registers now and then its ripple effect.

I am far from suggesting that this is what Thomas Hardy was after in this line. Rather, it was what this line was after in Thomas Hardy, and he responded. And as though he was somewhat perplexed by what escaped from under his pen, he tried to domesticate it by resorting to familiarly Victorian diction in "Afar or nigh around." Yet the diction of this conjunction was destined to become the diction of twentieth-century poetry, more and more. It is only two or three decades from "terrestrial things" to Auden's "necessary murder" and "artificial wilderness." For its "terrestrial things" line alone, "The Darkling Thrush" is a turn-of-the-century poem.

And the fact that Hardy responded to the inanimate voice of this conjunction had to do obviously with his being well prepared to heed this sort of thing, not only by his agnosticism (which might be enough), but by practically any poem's vector upward, by its gravitation toward epiphany. In principle, a poem goes down the page as much as it goes up in spirit, and "The Darkling Thrush" adheres to this principle closely. On this course, irrationality is not an obstacle, and the ballad's tetrameters and trimeters bespeak a considerable familiarity with irrationality:

> That I could think there trembled through
> His happy good-night air
> Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
> And I was unaware.

What brings our author to this "blessed Hope" is above all the centrifugal momentum developed by the amassment of thirty alternating tetrameters and trimeters, requiring either vocal or mental resolution, or both. In this sense, this turn-of-the-century poem is very much about itself, about its composition which – by happy coincidence – gravitates toward its finale the way the century does. A poem, in fact, offers a century its own, not necessarily rational, version of the future, thereby making the

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century possible. Against all odds, against the absence of "cause."

And the century – which is soon to be over – has gallantly paid this poem back, as we see in this classroom. In any case, as prophecies go, "The Darkling Thrush" has proved to be more sober and accurate than, let's say, "The Second Coming," by W. B. Yeats. A thrush proved a more reliable source than a falcon; perhaps because this thrush showed up for Mr. Hardy some twenty years earlier. Perhaps because monotony is more in tune with time's own idiom than a shriek.

So if "The Darkling Thrush" is a poem about nature, it is so only by half, since both bard and bird are that nature's effects, and only one of them is, to put it coarsely, hopeful. It is, rather, a poem about two perceptions of the same reality, and as such it is clearly a philosophical lyric. There is no hierarchy here between hope and hopelessness, distributed in the poem with notable evenhandedness – certainly not between their carriers, as our thrush, I am tempted to point out, is not "aged" for nothing. It's been around, and its "blessed Hope" is as valid as the absence thereof. The last line's caesura isolating "unaware" is eloquent enough to muffle out regret and bring to the last word an air of assertion. After all, the "blessed Hope" is that for the future; that's why the last word here is spoken by reason.

V

Twelve years later – but still before the Irish bard's beast set out for Bethlehem – the British passenger liner *Titanic* sank on her maiden voyage in the mid-Atlantic after colliding with an iceberg. Over fifteen hundred lives were lost. That was presumably the first of many disasters the century ushered in by Thomas Hardy's thrush became famous for.

"The Convergence of the Twain" was written barely two weeks after the catastrophe; it was published shortly afterward, on May 14th. The *Titanic* was lost on April 14th. In other words, the raging controversy over the cause of the disaster, the court case against the company, the shocking survivors' accounts, etc. – all those things were still ahead at the time of this poem's composition. The poem thus amounts to a visceral response on the part of our poet; what's more, the first time it was printed, it was accompanied by a headnote saying "Improvised on the Loss of the *Titanic*."

So, what chord did this disaster strike in Mr. Hardy? "The Convergence of the Twain" is habitually billed by the critical profession either as the poet's condemnation of modern man's self-delusion of technological omnipotence or as the song of his vainglory's and excessive luxury's comeuppance. To be sure, the poem is both. The *Titanic* itself was a

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marvel of both modern shipbuilding and ostentatiousness. However, no less than in the ship, our poet seems to be interested in the iceberg. And it is the iceberg's generic – triangular – shape that informs the poem's stanzaic design. So does "A Shape of Ice" 's animate nature vis-à-vis the poem's content.

At the same time, it should be noted, the triangular shape suggests the ship: by alluding to the standard representation of a sail. Also, given our poet's architectural past, this shape could connote for him an ecclesiastical edifice or a pyramid. (After all, every tragedy presents a riddle.) In verse, the foundation of such a pyramid would be hexameter, whose caesura divides its six feet into even threes: practically the longest meter available, and one Mr. Hardy was particularly fond of, perhaps because he taught himself Greek.

Although his fondness for figurative verse (which comes to us from Greek poetry of the Alexandrian period) shouldn't be overstated, his enterprise with stanzaic patterns was great enough to make him sufficiently self-conscious about the visual dimension of his poems to make such a move. In any case, the stanzaic design of "The Convergence of the Twain" is clearly deliberate, as two trimeters and one hexameter (normally conveyed in English precisely by two trimeters – also the convergence of a twain) show, held together by the triple rhyme.

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent,
The sea-worm crawls – grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

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V
Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"

VI
Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII
Prepared a sinister mate
For her – so gaily great –
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII
And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX
Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X
Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI
Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

This is your bona fide occasional poem in the form of a public address. In fact, it is an oration; it gives you the feeling that it should be spoken from a pulpit. The opening line – "In a solitude of the sea" – is extraordinarily spacious, both vocally and visually, suggesting the width of the sea's horizon and that degree of elemental autonomy which is capable of perceiving its own solitude.

But if the opening line scans the vast surface, the second line – "Deep from human vanity" – takes you farther away from the human

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sphere, straight into the heart of this utterly isolated element. In fact, the second line is an invitation for the underwater journey which is what the first half of the poem – a lengthy exposition again! – amounts to. Toward the end of the third line, the reader is well along on a veritable scuba-diving expedition.

Trimeters are a tricky proposition. They may be rewarding euphonically, but they naturally constrain the content. At the outset of the poem they help our poet to establish his tonality; but he is anxious to get on with the business of the poem. For this, he gets the third, quite capacious hexametric line, in which he proceeds indeed in a very businesslike, bloody-minded fashion:

> And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

The first half of this line is remarkable for its pile-up of stresses, no less than for what it ushers in: the rhetorical, abstract construct which is, on top of that, also capitalized. Now, "the Pride of Life" is of course linked syntactically to "human vanity," but this helps matters little because *(a)*"human vanity" is not capitalized, and *(b)*it is still more coherent and familiar a concept than the Pride of Life. Furthermore, the two *n*'s in "that planned her" give you a sense of a truly jammed, bottle neck-type diction, befitting an editorial more than a poem.

No poet in his right mind would try to cram all this into half a line: it is barely utterable. On the other hand, as we've noted, there were no mikes. Actually, "And the Pride of Life that planned her," though menaced by its mechanical scansion, can be delivered out loud, to the effect of somewhat unwarranted emphasis; the effort, however, will be obvious. The question is, why does Thomas Hardy do this? And the answer is, because he is confident that the image of the ship resting at the bottom of the sea and the triple rhyme will bail this stanza out.

"Stilly couches she" is indeed a wonderful counterbalance to the unwieldy pile-up of stresses ushering it in. The two l's – a "liquid" consonant – in "stilly" almost convey the gently rocking body of the ship. As for the rhyme, it clinches the femininity of the ship, already emphasized by the verb "couches." For the purposes of the poem, this suggestion is indeed timely.

What does our poet's deportment in this stanza and, above all, in its third line tell us about him? That he is a very calculating fellow (at least he counts his stresses). Also, that his pen is driven less by a sense of harmony than by his central idea, and that his triple rhyme is a euphonic necessity second and a structural device first. As rhymes go, what we've got in this stanza is no great shakes. The best that can be said about it is that

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it is highly functional and reverberates the wonderful fifteenth-century poem sometimes attributed to Dunbar:

> In what estate so ever I be
> *Timor mortus conturbat me . . .*
> "All Christian people, behold and see:
> This world is but a vanity
> And replete with necessity.
> *Timor mortis conturbat me."*

It's quite possible that these lines indeed set "The Convergence of the Twain" in motion, because it is a poem above all about vanity and necessity, as well, of course, as about fear of death. However, what perturbs the seventy-two-year-old Thomas Hardy in his poem is precisely necessity.

> Steel chambers, late the pyres
> Of her salamandrine fires,
> Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

We are indeed on an underwater journey here, and although the rhymes are not getting any better (we encounter our old friend "lyres"), this stanza is striking because of its visual content. We are clearly in the engine room, and the entire machinery is seen quiveringly refracted by water. The word that really stars in this stanza is "salamandrine." Apart from its mythological and metallurgical connotations, this four-syllable-long, lizard-like epithet marvelously evokes the quivering motion of the element directly opposite to water: fire. Extinguished, yet sustained, as it were, by refractions.

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SUSAN SONTAG

Danilo Kiš

The death of Danilo Kiš on October 15, 1989, at the age of fifty-four, wrenchingly cut short one of the most important journeys in literature made by any writer during the second half of the twentieth century. Born on the rim of the Yugoslav cauldron (in Subotica, near the frontier with Hungary) a few years before the Second World War to a Hungarian-Jewish father (Kiš is a Hungarian name), who perished in Auschwitz, and a Serb Orthodox mother from rural Montenegro, raised mostly in Hungary and in Montenegro, a graduate in literature of the university in Belgrade, where he made his debut as a writer, eventually a part-time expatriate, doing some teaching in France, and finally a full-time one, in Paris, where he lived his last ten years, Kiš had a life-span that matched, from start to finish, what might have been thought the worst the century had to offer his part of Europe: Nazi conquest and the genocide of the Jews, followed by Soviet take-over.

The year Kiš died of cancer, 1989, was of course the *annus mirabilis* in which Soviet-style totalitarian rule ended in Central Europe. By mid-October, the collapse of what had seemed immutable was clearly underway; three weeks later, the Berlin Wall was torn down. It is comforting to think that he died knowing only the good news. Happily – it is the only thing about his premature death which gives some consolation – he didn't live to see the collapse of the multi-confessional, multi-ethnic state of which he was a citizen (his "mixed" origin made Kiš very much a Yugoslav), and the return on European soil, in his own country, of concentration camps and genocide. An ardent foe of nationalist vanities, he would have loathed Serb ethnic fascism even more than he loathed the neo-Bolshevik official culture of the Second Yugoslavia it has replaced. It is hard to imagine that, if he were still alive, he could have borne the destruction of Bosnia.

The amount of history, or horror, a writer is obliged to endure does not make him or her a great writer. But geography is destiny. For Kiš there was no retreating from an exalted sense of the writer's place and of the

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writer's responsibility that, literally, came with the territory. Kiš came from a small country where writers are for better and for worse important, with the most gifted becoming moral, and sometimes even political, legislators. Perhaps more often for worse: it was eminent Belgrade writers who provided the ideological underpinning of the Serbian genocidal project known as "ethnic cleansing." The complicity of most Serb writers and artists not in exile in the current triumph of Greater Serbian imperialism suggests that the anti-nationalist voices, of which Kiš was the bravest and most eloquent, have always been in the minority. Much as by temperament and exquisitely cosmopolitan literary culture he would have preferred a less embattled course, in which literature was kept separate from politics, Kiš was always under attack and therefore, necessarily, on the attack. The first fight was against provincialism. This was not so much the provincialism of a small literature (for the former Yugoslavia produced at least two world-class prose writers, Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža) as of a state-supported, state-renewed literature. It could be fought simply by his being the utterly independent, artistically ambitious writer he was, almost from the beginning. But worse attacks were to come.

One of those writers who are first of all readers, who prefer dawdling and grazing and blissing out in the Great Library and surrender to their vocation only when the urge to write becomes unbearable, Kiš was not what would be called prolific. In his lifetime he published nine books, seven of them in the fourteen years between 1962, when he was twenty-seven, and 1976, when he was forty-one. First came a pair of short novels, *The Attic* and *Psalm 44* (published in 1962; not yet translated into English). The second book, *Garden, Ashes* (1965), was a novel. The third, *Early Sorrows* (1968, also not yet translated), was a book of stories. The fourth, *Hourglass* (1972), was a novel. The fifth and sixth were two collections of essays, *Po-etika* (1972) and *Po-etika II* (1974). The seventh, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (1976), was a collection of thematically linked stories that his publishers chose to call a novel. He wrote it while an instructor in Serbo-Croatian at the University of Bordeaux, as he'd written *Garden, Ashes* while he taught at Strasbourg.

By this time, Kiš was spending more and more time abroad, though he did not consider himself to be in exile, any more than he would have said he was a "dissident writer": it was too clear to him that writing worthy of the name of literature had to be unofficial. With this seventh book, a suite of fictional case histories of the Stalinist Terror, Kiš's work finally attracted the international attention it deserved. *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* also attracted a seven-month-long campaign of negative attention back home in Belgrade. The campaign, which reeked of anti-Semitism, centered on

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an accusation, that the book was a web of plagiarism from an arcane bibliography, to which Kiš had no choice but to respond. The result was his eighth book, *The Anatomy Lesson* (1978). Defending *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* against these scurrilous charges, Kiš mounted a full-scale exposition of his literary genealogy (that is, his literary tastes), a post- or proto-modernist poetics of the novel, and a portrait of what a writer's honor could be. During the next ten years, he published only one more book, *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* (1984), a collection of unlinked stories.

The Western European, and eventually North American, acclaim for *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* – typically confining it within the literature of dissidence from "the other Europe" – had brought about translations of the earlier books into the major foreign languages, and Kiš started to be invited to first-rank literary conferences, to win prizes and to seem a plausible Nobel candidate. Becoming an internationally famous writer meant becoming a much interviewed writer. Asked to pronounce on literary matters and, invariably, to comment on the infamies back home, he did so with a rueful, always incisive combativeness – he gave splendidly substantive interviews. He was also asked to contribute short pieces to newspapers and magazines – treating no literary solicitation as ever less than an occasion for intensity. Recalling that Kiš published only one book of fiction in the last decade of his life, one can't but regret that he gave as many interviews, wrote as many essays and prefaces, as he did. A poet in prose as well as a prince of indignation, Kiš surely was not best employed in these discursive forms. No great writer of fiction is. And unlike Italo Calvino and Thomas Bernhard, who were also lost to literature in the late 1980s, Kiš had probably not yet done the best of what he was capable in fiction. But the novels and stories he did write still assure him a place alongside these two somewhat senior, far more prolific contemporaries – which is to say that Kiš is one of the handful of incontestably major writers of the second half of the century.

Kiš had a complicated literary genealogy, which he was undoubtedly simplifying when he declared himself, as he often did, a child of Borges and of Bruno Schulz. But to marry the cosmopolitan Argentine to the immured small-town Polish Jew sounds the right note. Most obviously, he was claiming foreign relatives over his descendance from his native Serbo-Croatian literary family. Specifically, by yoking together the serenely, speculatively erudite Borges and the inward-looking, hyper-descriptive Schulz, he was pointing to the principal double strand in his own work. Odd mixtures were very much to Kiš's taste. His "mixed" literary methods – most fully realized in *Hourglass* (historical fiction) and *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (fictional history) – gave him exactly the right freedoms to advance the cause of both truth and art. Finally: one can, in literature,

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choose one's own parents. But nobody obliges a writer to declare his or her parentage. Kiš, however, had to proclaim his. Like every writer who is a great reader, he was an inveterate enthusiast about the work of others. His talent for admiration also made him an extremely collegial writer, which he expressed best in the numerous translations of contemporary writers he undertook from French, Hungarian, Russian, and English into Serbo-Croatian. In expatriation he was still really back home, in his head and in all his work – despite his lived estrangement from the literary world of his native country. He had never forsaken them, though they had betrayed him.

When Kiš died in Paris in 1989, the Belgrade press went into national mourning. The renegade star of Yugoslav literature had been extinguished. Safely dead, he could be eulogized by the mediocrities who had always envied him and had engineered his literary excommunication, and who would then proceed – as Yugoslavia fell apart – to become official writers of the new post-Communist, national chauvinist order. Kiš is, of course, admired by everyone who genuinely cares about literature, in Belgrade and elsewhere. The place in the former Yugoslavia where he was and is perhaps most ardently admired is Sarajevo. Literary people there did not exactly ply me with questions about American literature when I went to Sarajevo for the first time in April 1993. But they were extremely impressed that I'd had the privilege of being a friend of Danilo Kiš. In besieged Sarajevo people think a lot about Danilo Kiš. His fervent screed against nationalism, incorporated into *The Anatomy Lesson,* is one of the two prophetic texts – the other is a story by Andric, "A Letter from 1920" – that one hears most often cited. As secular, multi-ethnic Bosnia – Yugoslavia's Yugoslavia – is crushed under the new imperative of one ethnicity/one state, Kiš is more present than ever. He deserves to be a hero in Sarajevo, whose struggle to survive embodies the honor of Europe.

Unfortunately, the honor of Europe has been lost at Sarajevo. Kiš and like-minded writers who spoke up against nationalism and fomented-from-the-top ethnic hatreds could not save Europe's honor, Europe's better idea. But it is not true that, to paraphrase Auden, a great writer does not make anything happen. At the end of the century, which is the end of many things, literature, too, is besieged. The work of Danilo Kiš preserves the honor of literature.

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DANILO KIŠ

Two Variations on Flaubert

Idiots and Martyrs

Until Flaubert, literature was a whole (recall Balzac), a totality of world and being, a pillar of life and society on the order of army, government, philosophy, state, family. With Flaubert began an age of "decadence" that has lasted to the present. Literature lost its dominance, its integrality.

Literature has had a hard time learning to live with the tragic awareness of a paradise lost. Witness Flaubert's vain attempt – through the work itself (*Bouvard and Pécuchet,* for example) – to recover its totalitarian status, its now unthinkable universality. He seemed not to realize that the world had been smashed to smithereens, that a previous static model had been forced into motion, that the age of the fixed easel was gone forever. He hoped to repair the *zerbrochener Krug,* the shattered jug, at all costs. Hence his style, hence his martyrdom. If prose did not disappear entirely after Balzac, we have mainly Flaubert to thank for it.

"Decadent" literature, born with Flaubert, has lasted, through Joyce, to the present. Aware of a unity gone forever and reconciled with the loss. Aware that it is doomed to fragmentation, yet hoping by means of fragmentation to provide a comprehensive vision of the world and humanity. In *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* Flaubert used documents from the past to locate a possible fixed point in this world of inconstant structures, thereby founding a literary school Foucault calls "the Fantasia of the Library."

Flaubert thus taught us that style is an entity unto itself and ushered us into an extended family of idiots and martyrs.

-1980

Flaubert and Borges

Thanks mainly to his correspondence and to the traces of creative effort clearly visible in his manuscripts, Flaubert's quest for the *mot juste,* the right word, and his *affres de style,* torments of style, are now legendary. His unique creative drive resulted from a suspicion he could never quite

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shake: that there was a gap between his intentions ("No one has ever imagined a more perfect type of prose than I") and his practice. Poor Flaubert believed the fault lay somewhere in him, in his talent; he did not realize that after Stendhal and Balzac a certain *form* of fiction was on its way out. The genre itself, as the formalists would say, had begun to weaken.

Flaubert appeared on the scene too early and, though within reach of a solution, was unable to make a radical break with the tradition of the realistic genre. His weakness stemmed from doubt: he sensed the arbitrary nature and the limitations of the psychological novel. Hence his flight into the exotic, where – because the reader could not hold them to the psychological standards of the age – characters had greater integrity, greater freedom of action.

Yet even in *Madame Bovary* he came to express implicit doubt as to the omniscience of the narrator and the art of psychological portraiture, those most pernicious and persistent of literary conventions. The further the plot progresses, the more his doubt intrudes. As the psychology of his protagonist eludes him, clear-cut statements ("she began to think of Les Bertaux") are hedged ever more frequently by expressions of equivocation ("Should she write to her father? It was too late, and *perhaps* she regretted not having given herself to the man," or "She had let herself be seduced by his words and even more by his voice, by his whole personality, so much so that she pretended to believe him or *perhaps* did believe the reasons for their parting").

One word, *perhaps*, was the first step on the road from psychological to modern fiction. By pointing up the abyss between the omniscient and the skeptical ("unreliable") narrator, it served as a sign that the genre was aging, a strand of gray in the luxuriant tresses of the realist classics.

Had Flaubert compressed the vast edifice of his exotic novel into a story reporting the contents of an imaginary and complex work entitled *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, had he reduced the material for *Bouvard and Pécuchet* to a story explicitly containing part of that material (which is easy to imagine given that the Borgesian idea of "presenting false bibliographic data as genuine" had in fact occurred to Flaubert), literature would not have had to wait a century for Borges's *Ficciones*.

-1986

Translated by Francis Jones

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Nabokov, or Nostalgia

Until the scandalous *Lolita* and its scandalously wretched film version, Nabokov was virtually unknown outside Russian émigré circles and a narrow set of devotees. In that period of great upheavals, neither critics nor readers expected much from this magnificent *talánt* (in Russian, accent on the second syllable), while mediocre writers, floodlit against the literary sky, their political allegories blown up into short stories or thinned out into novels, achieved enormous popularity.

At that time, Nabokov remained a solitary aristocrat (in the Baudelarian sense of the word, an aristocrat of the spirit), remote not only from world events but also from the traditional political struggles into which so many émigrés threw themselves body and soul, and which rewarded them only with hangovers and the bitter taste of defeat. In both Berlin and Paris he had seen countless talents burn themselves out in the flames of political passion and nostalgia, in polemics, feuds, poverty, and madness, escape into messianism, Pan-Slavism, Occidentalism, spiritist evocations of the Russian past, Orthodoxy, nationalism, anti-Semitism, betrayal, espionage, palmistry and nirvana, or else, driven by homesickness and, equating bolshevism with populism, return to Russia and spiritual servitude, the firing squad, or suicide.

Sirin-Nabokov* understood the vanity of these passions in time; he saw the absurdity of all the Russian émigré governments, clubs, parties, and circles flirting with fascism, bolshevism, Trotskyism, and the NKVD (which incidentally on the eve of the War had its privileged hunting ground in the West, especially in France, where it bagged big tsarist game no less than small Troskyist partridges). In the brilliant stories he published in Russian émigré journals, he portrayed the members of this unhappy émigré society, incapable of assimilating into the local population or of even engaging in useful political activity (if only to open the eyes of the stream of French tourists to the fact that they had been shown Potemkin villages in the Soviet Union) or – in spite of their talent – in creative endeavors. Nabokov realized that there was no hope of opposing the Star of Bethlehem rising in the East, promising to fulfill all the hopes of unfortunate mankind and put an end to the blind power of

* The pseudonym Nabokov adopted in 1921 for his Russian writings.

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history, which now at last would be guided by human will (and not by irrational forces of necessity), that the Hegelian *Weltgeist* was irresistible for the time being, and that a writer's best bet was to ignore the somnambulist attraction of the Great Illusion and "cultivate his garden."

Thus he found himself isolated from all – he who by the logic of his origins should have been able to devote his pen and his mind to a "higher cause," to write about past glory, the exploits of the vanquished, about rivers of blood and grandiose crimes. He would have been hated and glorified, he would have been a messiah and a victim, a living scandal, Solzhenitsyn before Solzhenitsyn, Panait Istrati and Victor Serge rolled into one. But Sirin-Nabokov wrote about the Bolsheviks (who appear quite incidentally in these stories) without hate, with the same detachment as he wrote about people with whom he (may have) sympathized; he wrote as though observing the world from the sidelines, askance, directing the lens of his camera at the drooping stockings of a former prima donna, at the bald pink skull of a famous general, at the trembling fingers of an alcoholic poet; he magnified the hairs in the nostrils or the rotten teeth in the mouth of a countess nibbling a sandwich (a *buterbrodik*) on a local train.

Surely either in the Berlin of the twenties or in the Paris of the thirties and forties, Nabokov could have met sufficient witnesses and collected sufficient direct, oral or written testimonies of Soviet reality (earlier and more reliable than Koestler's, for example) and thus become a key witness to an epoch. Being a witness does not preclude literary mastery (see Babel, Pilnyak, etc.). For Nabokov, however, history was the illusion of an illusion. And if he overlooked the crucial fact of the twentieth century – the camps – and rejected them as material unworthy of his pen, it was not only because he did not wish to waste his life in vain polemics but also because he placed his bet on an eternity rather than on the moment. (Nineteenth-century Russian literature gave him enough examples of glorious victories and glorious defeats.)

Nabokov's conception of the world and humanity is an idealistic one: the world is mere appearance and art is a reflection of the Platonic models, the image of a lost paradise. The artist is the double of the demiurge, and his world is only remotely connected with the outward aspects of life: "Imagination is only a form of memory." He therefore rejects all art that is based on current events. "A work of art is of no interest to society . . . What protects a work of art from moths and rust is not its social significance but solely its artistic value." Nabokov views the political animal (*zoon politikon*) with contempt because it is devoid of idealism: its world is empty and so simplified that it cannot be the object

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of art. And when one cannot dream, one had best keep silent.

Convinced in his way of the potency, the omnipotence, of art (and culture), he turned into a scoffing parodist when depicting the reactions of the political animal: tyrants, like vices, he felt, can be exterminated by mockery. He also believed – and he may have been right – that the world of barbarism can be combated only by the world of art, that even if art does not act directly on people and events it can, like music, slowly but surely temper human nature.

This conception of art may well have come from his "rich nostalgia" – the world surrounding him in Russia was a world of kindness, beauty, and love (which are perhaps the same thing), a world of culture, in which art, poetry, and music made deep inroads on the human heart. The fact is that Nabokov saw only the sunny side of Russia, nests of noblemen, blonde princesses, urbane and cultivated individuals, whereas the seamy side, the crude and cruel world of *muzjiks* and misery, passed him by as though seen through the windows of a Pullman. That is why, little by little, his "timeless Russia" became a mythical country, the Zembla, a fairytale country without geographical identification, Vinland, Courland, Zoorland, a Terra Nabokoviana, where people speak "a Nordic tongue," an imaginary childhood language.

Nabokov's art derives its emotional charge from the first twenty years of his life, those passed in Russia; they are the source of his arsenal of images, his wealth of imagery, the wellspring of his inspiration. The Russia of his childhood is his lost paradise, his *Paradise Lost,* its images and archetypes (*pardon, maître!*) feeding his writing to the end of his days, with exile merely stimulating his nostalgia. Like Alice/Anya he passed through a magic looking-glass and found himself in Wonderland, a fairytale country that seems as familiar to him as one of Pnin's linguistic misunderstandings, for it was indeed a *Vaterland* and bore a close resemblance to Russia at the turn of the century. This enchanted realm has castles surrounded by parks, where butterflies flutter and true princesses stroll as in the novels of Tolstoy. One of the princesses is so much like a certain Mashenka/Lolita that one might be led to believe that when princesses pass through the looking-glass, they are punished by emerging as coquettes and debauchees.

Nabokov experienced the loss of the paradise of his childhood in a scholastic sense as the fall of the angel. And in this fall the work of divine machination, the role of history, is negligible.

The whole of Nabokov's work is nothing if not a segmented Proustian *recherche du paradis perdu,* and his butterflies, the ones in his books and the ones he chased throughout the world (one of which, like

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a distant star, bears his name) are only a symptom of his eternal nostalgia, the sole proof his paradise existed. His lepidopterian myth, which he cultivated consciously and stubbornly, is merely a response and a challenge to a "bestial century" (as Mandelstam called it), a sign and message: while the world howls with the wolves, the master-demiurge leaves his ivory tower, a tower of ideas closely resembling the chess piece, and chases butterflies, those flying flowers which are the presence of art in a world without God, and infinitesimal (material) proof or scholastic argument for the existence of paradise, for the *possibility* of its existence.

Hell as antithesis, the radical evil of our century – Nabokov had no desire to consider it or approach the flames more closely than is permitted to mortal man. For there reign chaos, sound and fury; its landscapes are gray and cruel like the Kolyma of the unfortunate Varlam Shalamov. Where civilization and culture have ceased to exist, where man's spiritual and moral qualities have been destroyed, there is no place for Nabokov's characters or for parody, games or memory. Nabokov's world is too domesticated, too humanized, too policed. The "aesthetic shudder," the tingling that creeps up the spinal column, "the highest form of emotion, which humanity achieved when it discovered pure art" (V.N.) has long become anguish and trembling, the fear of death. It is their timelessness that makes Nabokov's novels seem as anachronistic as their nineteenth-century counterparts. Their themes and techniques make them slightly frivolous fairy tales. A magnificent, complex, and sterile art, to paraphrase Nabokov's characterization of the art of composing chess problems.

Nabokov wished to oppose the world of barbarism and chaos to a world of order and form, to give back art its role of demiurge, to rehabilitate the classical model of master and mastery. Like the *poètes maudits,* he created an artificial paradise in which there is no opium but poetry, and he peopled this paradise with hominids – all his characters are to some extent somnambulists or dream characters moving in a world of illusion, beyond good and evil, and the terrible tumult of history barely reaches them. These creatures of dream and memory, these fallen angels, are devoid of blood, or else their blood is blue and violet like ink; they are the fruits of immaculate conception and subject to an eternal longing, a medieval erotic dream; children are brought into this world without pain and people die easily – in the last chapter with a stroke of the pen – like pieces toppled on the chessboard returning to their nonexistence.

And yet Nabokov's condemnation of a certain variety of literature and of certain writers is more moralistic than aesthetic. All his work – his stories and novels, his essays, lectures, and interviews – his whole stance, is

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a fervent plea for the preservation of spiritual values, a polemic against spiritual chaos, against the stupidity of the age, against false values, against the brand of criticism that judges works of art by non-aesthetic, psychological, or (God forbid!) psychoanalytical criteria. If criticism has not quite degenerated into lunacy, if literature has not become the handmaiden of ideology but remained a dream and an escape, a play of the spirit and the imagination, an act of culture par excellence, we have in large part the master-magician Nabokov to thank for it.

-1986

Translated by Ralph Manheim

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WALTER LAQUEUR

Postfascism, Postcommunism

As the age of fascism and Communism appears to recede into the past, it should be possible to look back with greater detachment and reach a deeper level of understanding. But for the time being this is little more than a noble dream. The new dawn of freedom, to begin with, seems as yet uncertain: Political movements have arisen in various parts of the world, which in some essential respects share basic features with fascism. The inspiration may be religious-radical in some cases, ultra-nationalist in others. Fifty years ago, it was generally accepted that fascism was an exclusively European affair; this was by and large true. Being a modern phenomenon, fascism was unthinkable in premodern societies; it became possible only at a certain level of economic, social, and technological development. Fascism beyond Europe was called "false-fascism," which was true at the time but is no longer correct with regard to the more advanced parts of the third world. The demise of Communism has also been less than total; the *nomenklatura* in most of these countries had a soft landing. The new rulers are no longer Communists, but neither are they social democrats or liberals or conservatives. If the general situation deteriorates, all kinds of extremist regimes might emerge.

Whether to call the new extremists of the right neo-fascists or post-fascists is a moot point. Other terms have been suggested including "right-wing radicalism," "nationalist populism," "radical- or right-wing populism," "right-wing extremes," "revolutionary nationalism," but these are no more satisfactory. Fascism resembles pornography, in that it is difficult and frequently impossible to define in an operational, legally valid way. Those with a little experience know it when they see it.

These developments on the political scene should not necessarily affect our assessment of the past, and it is sometimes argued that historians and political scientists have made huge progress over the last decades in their analysis of fascism and Communism. Concerning the study of the specific aspects this is certainly true, but it is questionable whether similar progress has been made in the interpretation of fascism and Communism. There is the legacy of the past: It is unthinkable that German nationalists (such as Ernst Nolte and Rainer Zittelmann) will ever reach agreement with Jewish historians (such as Saul Friedlander and Dan Diner) about the place of the Holocaust in history. Those who believe that historical

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truth is easier to attain from a point of view equidistant from the "extremes" have put themselves in a safer position; whether they are closer to historical truth is by no means certain. There are excellent new works on interpretation, above all Stanley Payne's magisterial *Fascism, History, and Interpretation*. But these are the achievements of individual writers and do not even remotely make up a consensus.

Among the literature on Nazism in recent years there is the influential thesis of a leading German historian that, everything considered, Hitler was a weak dictator and that much of the time chaos prevailed under the surface of the Third Reich. (The same thesis was put forward some years ago with regard to Stalin.) A group of younger German historians, including Susanne Heim and Goetz Aly, attribute the Final Solution to the ambitious plans of technocrats to establish a new order in Eastern Europe. The Jews, in other words, were not killed because of anti-Semitism but because of the desire of the planners to rationalize industrial production, to remove the premodern sectors, and to reduce overpopulation.

In his subsequent book recently published and widely hailed in Germany, *Endlösung,* Aly slightly modifies his views inasmuch as he considers the dynamic of Nazi resettlement policy just one of the factors leading to the mass murders. But he still believes that Himmler, Heydrick, Eichmann *et al* somehow maneuvered themselves into a cul-de-sac; that there had never been an order from Hitler to exterminate the Jews (even though Himmler, in a famous speech in 1943, said that there had been such an order); and that the Jews were killed, if not as the result of a series of accidents, then in consequence of some imperfect blueprint made by some not very competent and short-sighted planners.

This view of the Final Solution as a genuinely rational, social, and economic concern is shared by Zygmund Bauman, a British professor of Polish origin. Princeton University scholar Arno Mayer has put forward a different theory, according to which Hitler had the Jews killed mainly because he hated the Communists so much. A whole legion of social historians on the left and the right has focused its research on Nazism as a modernizing factor. The state of affairs is further confounded because the arguments of the revisionists of the left are picked up by the revisionists of the extreme right, so that in the end it is exceedingly difficult to establish with any certainty who claims what and from what ideological vantage point.

Broadly speaking, the right wants to "historicize" the Holocaust, that is to say, to put it into a wider historical perspective. This means equating the mass murders of World War II with the civil wars in Bosnia

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or perhaps in Somalia, pressing for an end to "the Auschwitz propaganda" which, in the words of one recent writer, "has no purpose other than to inculcate a bad conscience among the Germans." According to this school of thought, bringing up Auschwitz except in a footnote is tantamount to the suppression of freedom of thought. And the prison doctor treating Knut Hamsun in prison, though a democrat, behaved in principle no differently from the way the Auschwitz doctors did. (Hamsun, the great Norwegian writer, was also a collaborator with the German occupants and therefore arrested after the war.) This is an interesting argument, thought it omits the fact that Hamsun was released from prison after a little while, whereas the patients of the Nazi doctors were less fortunate. It may be true on the level of abstraction that, as Harvard University historian Charles Maier has written, historicization need not necessarily lead to apology, but in actual fact it usually does.

The revisionists of the left, on the other hand, want to make the mass murders "sociological." They pay little attention to ideological (and even political) considerations and concentrate on socioeconomic factors. The net result of these approaches, while not identical, is very similar. They are by no means fringe views, and very often they are given a sympathetic hearing by mainstream historians. They are welcome as novel interpretations which should be given serious attention and further explored, even though it may appear in the end that the original claims were somewhat exaggerated. A majority of historians in Germany and elsewhere now probably belongs to the "historicizers," although there are notable exceptions such as German liberals of the older generation, including Karl Dietrich Bracher and Eberhard Jaeckel.

About three-quarters of the population of Germany wants a line to be drawn through the Nazi past, and German historians do not live in a political vacuum. The percentages in Britain and America may be less dramatic, but there too other historical concerns are taking over, and academic fashions call for new historical and sociological perspectives on Nazism. Historians are more and more interested in social history and the history of everyday life, for, they reason, the great majority was perfectly normal, except that the whole enterprise ended in disaster. The great majority was neither Jewish nor anti-Nazi, and they enjoyed themselves. Seen in this light, "historicization" and "sociologization" are indeed inevitable. Only Jewish historians, overtaken by these developments, find it difficult to draw a line through the extinction of one-third of their people, and they are criticized for being unforgiving and unyielding.

There was, of course, more to Nazism than Auschwitz, and it is certainly true that at the bottom of some of the revisionist arguments there is usually some rational kernel. The argument about chaos in the

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Third Reich and Hitler's weakness is an obvious example. It is perfectly true that Hitler (and Stalin) did not personally make every decision, which would have been physically impossible. On issues that were not central to his beliefs, Hitler would prevaricate or change his opinions from one day to the next. He was not omnipotent. On some issues he left the initiative to others, especially after the outbreak of the war. In the meantime his aides were scheming against each other, quarreling and fighting for influence. At times Hitler acted as a reluctant arbiter, at others he did not want to be bothered at all. But it is ridiculous to imagine that he presided over a bureaucratic chaos, leaving all initiatives to his underlings, playing them out against each other.

Whether an individual is strong or weak, tall or small, clever or stupid, is a relative statement. It depends on the yardstick used. Compared to Orwell's *1984,* Nazi Germany (and *a fortiori* fascist Italy) were in a permanent state of anarchy. Compared with other systems known in history, they were effective dictatorships. It is astonishing, all things considered, how much Hitler interfered and to what extent he was in control. A random look at the instructions emanating from his chancery shows that he gave orders that Furtwängler, the famous conductor, should not participate in the Salzburg festival of 1938; that residents of Munich should be permitted to drink "strong beer," opposing a planned reduction in its alcohol content. He ordered that a public statue at the Rhine should be illuminated by night; that the iron bars at the windows of a museum in Munich should not be painted black but bronze-gold; that his aides should wear rubber soles; that Gerhardinger, an obscure painter, should not be mentioned in the media; that prominent foreign visitors should not be fed tinned mushrooms because of the danger of poisoning (this in May 1942!); that foreigners should be given no angling permits; that the monthly maximum fee for a rented garage should be seven marks all over Germany. He wanted to know how many violins the Vienna Symphony Orchestra had in 1942 and how much artificial honey was produced in Germany; he ordered that Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* should no longer be performed and that male personnel should no longer serve in restaurants. He decided, among many other things, that the physicist Heinrich Hertz, a half-Jew, should not become an unperson and that the term *Kilohertz* should also be used in the future.

It could well be that Hitler's instructions concerning angling permits for foreigners were occasionally disregarded on the local level, and that in some places a rent higher than seven marks was charged for garage rentals. And it is, of course, also true that on many subjects there were no instructions at all. However, there is overwhelming evidence that on

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the issues close to his heart, for instance, the destruction of his political enemies at home, the murder of the Jews, rearmament, foreign policy, and the conduct of the war, power was concentrated in his hands, and no one could possibly deviate for any length of time from the guidelines he set. And if Hitler did not make certain important decisions, all that matters is that he *could* have made them and would have been obeyed.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union had a certain impact on the field of Soviet studies. It led (within modest limits) to a spring cleaning, causing a rethinking of earlier approaches to the Communist regime that were clearly wrong. Students of fascism, on the other hand, have suffered no such trauma. If the disappearance of the DDR had any impact, it was that of reinforcing the nationalist arguments. Neither right nor left see any urgent need to reconsider their theses about subjects such as Nazi rationalization and modernization, and it would be unrealistic to expect a quick change in this respect.

Of all the postmortems on Communism, Francois Furet's *Le passé d'une illusion,* a book-length essay on the Communist idea in the twentieth century, is the most noteworthy so far and has attracted much attention well beyond France. Furet teaches history both at the Sorbonne and at the University of Chicago. He is known for his pioneering work on the French Revolution which has greatly contributed to our reassessment of it. Together with Denis Richet, Pierre Nora, and others, he assaulted (and defeated) the Jacobinian orthodoxy which had dominated French historiography for almost a century. He also showed how this treatment of the French Revolution (including the Terror) influenced the reception of the Russian Revolution (including the Purges and the Terror.) His new book contains much of great interest about Communism and fellow travelers in France between and after the two world wars. Furet writes in part from the vantage point of an insider; he was a member of the Communist Party from 1949-1956. He writes that he now looks at his blindness "sans indulgence mais sans acrimonie." Much of his book seems to me eminently sensible, and some is brilliant, but I do have some disagreements with its arguments.

The central part of Furet's book is devoted to the relationship among Communism, fascism, and anti-fascism, and it is in this context that questions and doubts arise. Is it really true that the European left (as Furet writes) was anti-fascist but not anti-totalitarian? This was almost correct with regard to France after World War II, what with the predominance of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and their like. But France is not quite Europe, even though French intellectuals sometimes tend to think

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so. Even in France in the 1930s, when fascism was the central political issue, few people on the left outside the Communist Party had any sympathy for Stalinism. The most determined resistance and the most systematic intellectual confrontation with totalitarianism came precisely from the democratic left. Virtually all theoretical thinking about totalitarianism came from German and also Russian democratic émigrés. The former prominently figures in Furet's book, but not the latter. The fault is not Furet's. The importance of Russian émigré thinking with regard to the origins of the concept of "totalitarianism" has been generally ignored so far, even though *Sovremennye Zapiski* (the main literary-political journal published in Paris) offers much of interest, as do the journals of the Mensheviks, the S. R., and the essays of G. Fedotov.

There is a tendency in Furet's book to equate Communism and fascism. Having devoted years of my life to finding common origins and features between these two movements and systems, I find myself in the unaccustomed role of disagreeing with what seems to me a simplification. It is fully understandable that a Soviet writer such as Vasily Grossman (1905-1964) the author of *Life and Fate,* whom Furet quotes at length, was struck by the common features between Stalinism and Hitlerism. Grossman was a writer of powerful novels, but he lived under a totalitarian regime in which knowledge about the Nazi and fascist systems was systematically suppressed. When confronting Nazism, the shock of recognition, in his case and that of some contemporaries, was almost blinding. Furet is not a novelist, but he still argues that Mussolini and Hitler were deeply influenced by Lenin and Stalin, and that as Waldemar Gurian put it, Hitler achieved better than Stalin Lenin's totalitarian promise and in Nazi Germany the most perfect Bolshevik state was established.

Furet's star witness is Hermann Rauschning; his three most important conceptualizers and interpreters Hannah Arendt, Ernst Nolte, and Gurian. Rauschning figures even more prominently in Richard Pipes's recent book, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, in a similar capacity. Rauschning was a German conservative from Poland who joined the Nazi party and at one time was head of the (Nazi-dominated) Danzig (Gdansk) local parliament. In 1936, when he discovered that Hitler was not a conservative at heart, he defected and emigrated. Rauschning's book, *The Nazi Revolution of Nihilism* (1938) made him known, and his next book, *Conversations with Hitler* (1939) became an international best-seller. It consists of alleged Hitler quotations such as "National Socialism is what Marxism might have been if it could have broken its absurd and artificial ties with a democratic order," and "I have learned a great deal

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from Marxism."

Rauschning's second book is well-written, interesting and at times prophetic. But it is not a primary source; it has been known for a long time that these were not conversations with Hitler (the French title, *Hitler m'a dit . . .*, was even more emphatic). In fact, Rauschning seldom saw Hitler and did not talk alone with him for more than a few minutes. Rauschning was neither Boswell nor Eckerman. His book was an essay in anti-Hitlerian propaganda, as such perfectly legitimate, and apparently also an endeavor to improve Rauschning's finances. He later emigrated to America and with his earnings bought a farm. Rauschning's books are still of considerable interest as the views of a contemporary observer. However, they are not a primary source for Hitler's *obiter dicta.*

Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism,* in Furet's words the most important intellectual contribution to the analysis of Communism, published in 1951, was certainly the most influential book at the time on this subject, linking the Nazi and Communist phenomenon as "essentially identical." But Arendt does not deal with Communism except in passing. Her book has much to say about Captain Dreyfus and Cecil Rhodes but hardly anything about Lenin. She was aware that the Marxist-Soviet dimension of the book was missing and intended to write this part in 1953 but somehow (as her biographer reports) never did. What she has to say about the Soviet Union is characterized by exaggeration. She glosses over its distinctions from Nazi Germany, arguing, for instance, that Hitler never intended to defend the "West" against Bolshevism – which is perfectly correct. But she then asserts that he always remained ready to join "the Reds" in the destruction of the West, even in the middle of the struggle against Soviet Russia, which is not true. Her convictions in this respect were emphatic but not apparently very deep. In subsequent editions of the book she retreated from her earlier exaggerations to new opposing ones. By 1957-58 she had reached the conclusion that ever since Stalin's death, the Soviet Union had engaged in "detotalitarianization" which was only partly correct. ("The clearest sign that the Soviet Union can no longer be called totalitarianism in the strict sense of the term is, of course, the amazingly swift and rich recovery of the arts in the last decade" – 1965.) This is a breathtaking reversal of her earlier views, with which neither Furet nor other serious students would agree. And what does all this leave of Arendt's original theses about the fundamentally new phenomenon (the "horrible originality of totalitarianism") based on depersonalization, the "mob," loneliness, the emergence of mass society remaking reality and changing man? Seen in this light, Stalinism was merely the old-fashioned tyranny of one man;

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with the death of the dictator, totalitarianism seems to have evaporated.

Seen in retrospect, the value of Arendt's book was not in startling new insights on the Soviet Union or indeed on Nazi Germany but in having started the discussion of totalitarianism which has not ended to this day. The reception of her book and its impact is covered in detail in Abbot Gleason's recently published wide-ranging study, *Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War.* A professor at Brown University, Gleason belongs to the generation which rebelled against the "Manichean world view" shared by his father, a well-known historian and (temporarily) senior official in the CIA. Over the years the younger Gleason came to realize that the cold warriors were not all wrong; in retrospect he is glad "that Stalin's enemies on our side were ideologically well armed," and he notes in retrospect that "most people on the Left have been highly resistant until recently to any suggestion that the classification of the Soviet Union as totalitarian is more than a conservative canard."

Yet with all the good will to be fair to all sides, old prejudices die hard, and as a result the "cold warriors" of yesterday are often described as shrill, self-serving, fanatical, and laughable, whereas their opponents, even if wrong, seem to have behaved in a measured, sober, and statesman-like way. There is, for instance, Gleason's reference to the brilliant Peter Ludz, a leading West German student of East German affairs. The unsuspecting reader cannot possibly know that it was more owing to his influence than to any other that the study of East Germany took a wrong turn some twenty-five years ago. The achievements and the rootedness of the East German regime were grossly exaggerated, and as a result the downfall of the DDR came as a total surprise to this school of students of East Germany.

Does Gleason's book then bear out Furet's strictures about the lacking anti-totalitarian enthusiasm of the left? Only up to a point, for of the "cold warriors" mentioned in Gleason's book, many were neither conservatives nor neoconservatives; this is simply the old conditioned reflex, to classify as such the more outspoken critics of Soviet policies. But George Orwell was not a conservative, nor was the AFL/CIO, nor was Norman Thomas, even though he wrote in 1948 that "Communism, whatever it was originally, is today Red fascism." One could add easily many more names to this list.

Hannah Arendt's guru on Communism and the Soviet Union in the early days was Waldemar Gurian, a University of Notre Dame professor, born in St. Petersburg of Jewish parents, educated in Germany, and con-

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verted to Catholicism. He died in 1954, and Arendt wrote a moving memoir, reprinted in *Men in Dark Times*. Reviewing Gurian's *Bolshevism* in *Partisan Review* in 1953, Arendt called it the "best analytical history of Bolshevism." Gurian was very knowledgeable about Russian literature and history. He followed Soviet and émigré publications and wrote about Russian affairs throughout his life. A deeply conservative thinker, a pupil of Max Scheler and Carl Schmitt, he was among the pioneers of the comparative study of "Red" and "Brown" Bolshevism. But he would not quite equate them. He conceded the "divergent contents" of National Socialist and Bolshevik doctrines but maintained that these were less important than the totalitarian structures the regimes had in common.

These arguments involved Gurian in certain difficulties. Was it really possible to "take over and imitate Bolshevik methods without accepting the contents of Marxism-Leninism?" Could one maintain at one and the same time that Nazism and Bolshevism were nihilist *and* that they were secular religions, and, at least in the case of Bolshevism, that ideology was of great importance? How great is the attraction of a nihilist religion?

At the distance of four decades and with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to point to the weaknesses of such interpretations. Hitlerism and Stalinism were unprecedented phenomena, and it was difficult to generalize. Events were changing rapidly; it would have been a near miracle if contemporaries had presented instant explanations that were correct in all essential points. Arendt, for instance, wrote in 1948 that without concentration camps, without the undefined fear they inspire and the very well-defined training they offered in totalitarian domination, a totalitarian state could neither inspire fanaticism nor maintain a whole people in complete apathy (*Partisan Review* 7, 1948). Yet there were no such camps in China, in Eastern Europe, or in Italy. Furthermore, the number of inmates in the German concentration camps in the winter of 1936–1937 was less than ten thousand, but the German regime was nevertheless totalitarian.

Ernst Nolte, the German philosopher of international fame, has always been primarily interested in fascist ideology rather than in the reality of Nazism. For over thirty years, he has given vent to a great many ideas about the war guilt of the Allies, about the Jews and Zionism, about "transcendence," about the fascist epoch being over. He has surveyed the interpretations of fascism over the ages and has written on fascist parties which did not come to power. However, he acquired fame not for these valuable insights but for the treatises in which he tried to demonstrate

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that neither fascism nor genocide were unique. This, to a large extent, caused the famous *Historikerstreit* in the 1980s and generated many attacks from outside Germany. More recently, Nolte has received substantial support in his own country from a younger generation of writers who accepted his nationalist writings as a liberating act.

Furet thinks highly of Nolte's accomplishment ("one of the most profound of the last half-century"), though he regrets Nolte's "exaggeration" on Jewish subjects. We shall leave aside Nolte's "Jewish" *obiter dicta*; they are not relevant in the present context. What remains are Nolte's theses on the relationship between Bolshevism and Nazism (and fascism in general). They can be summarized as follows: Nazism was a reply, a justified reaction to Bolshevism. Asiatic barbarism was imported to Germany from the East – the party discipline, the Gulag, the Purges, the Terror. Nazi violence was almost always preventive; the Nazi policy of extermination in the East was a copy of the Bolshevik extermination of the *kulaks* and other class enemies. Gestapo methods were a copy of the GPU, the Russian political police. There was a real threat of a Communist takeover in Germany in 1932-1933, and later in Europe, of which Hitler was mortally afraid – hence Hitler's defensive policy of forestalling the Bolsheviks in 1941. Seen in this light, Hitler and also Mussolini appear as (reluctant) pupils or at least imitators of Lenin and Stalin. Given the realities of world affairs, did they have any alternative but to combat Asian barbarism by the same atrocious means? It is intelligible that views of this kind should be voiced by a German nationalist eager to reduce Nazi and German responsibility for the crimes committed in peace and war. It is less obvious why anyone not belonging to this category should accept such versions (or perversions) of history.

Arendt argued the opposite case, in her preface to Part Three of *The Origins of Totalitarianism:* If towards the end of his life Stalin was about to engage in a major anti-Semitic campaign, this showed to what an extent he had been influenced by Hitler. In fact, there is no evidence that Stalin needed Hitler's inspiration, and vice versa; their crimes came to them quite naturally. They were home-grown, and no foreign importations were needed. What evidence is there for the Nazis' (and the fascists') mortal fear of Soviet Communism and their apprenticeship at the knees of Lenin and Stalin? In the very early days, there was a limited Russian impact on the Nazi leaders when refugees from Russia brought the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to Germany; however, these gurus were not Communists but belonged to the extreme right. Readers will look in vain for any mention of Lenin in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Marxism does appear a few times, but Hitler makes it clear that he refers to the Social

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Democrats, not to the Communists.

There is, in fact, no evidence that Hitler and the other Nazi leaders spent sleepless nights because of a fear of Communism, and the ease with which they destroyed the KPD in 1933 justified their appraisal. In a few weeks, nothing was left of the strongest and most faithful Communist party outside of the Soviet Union. As for Mussolini, he repeatedly ridiculed the idea that there had been a danger of a Communist takeover at the time of the "March on Rome." Up to the outbreak of World War II, the Italian radio magazines featured the programs of Radio Moscow, which also tends to show that the fascists cannot have been very concerned about Soviet propaganda. There were, of course, anti-Communist speeches by Hitler and Goebbels, and much anti-Soviet literature was published, but this has never been in doubt. The decisive issue is that Hitler went to war in 1939 not against the alleged *Weltfeind* (global enemy) but against Britain and France, and he declared war in 1941 against the United States without any good reason from his point of view, instead of concentrating all efforts against the Soviet Union.

Nolte's sources are curious. His star witness is Zinoviev, the Bolshevik leader who allegedly wrote on September 17, 1918 that "we must attract to our ranks ninety million Russians out of one hundred million citizens; the rest should be destroyed." An hysterical loudmouth, Zinoviev was never taken very seriously as a politician. His statement, which allegedly appeared in a provincial newspaper, *Severnaya Kommuna,* has been quoted endlessly for many years by the Russian extreme right. I have never met anyone who actually saw the original text. But even if one assumes for argument's sake that it did appear, what would it prove? Outrageous and bloodthirsty statements have been made at all times by individuals. Another favorite Nolte source is Alexandra (Alia) Rachmanova, a Russian émigré of 1917 vintage. As a boy in Germany, I used to read her enormously popular documentary novels, published in installments in illustrated weeklies with titles such as *Als Milchfrau in Ottakring* (*A Milkwoman in Working-class Vienna*) and *Tragödie einer Liebe* (*Tragedy of a Love*). There is nothing essentially wrong with *Trivial Literatur* as historical source material, but one should not regard doubtful Zinoviev quotations and the likes of Mrs. Rachmanova as sufficient factual base for sweeping generalizations.

In brief, Hitler and Mussolini were not the disciples of Lenin and Stalin. They showed not the slightest interest in either Communist ideology or Soviet practice. They realized much earlier than Stalin did the uses of nationalism to mobilize the masses. To understand that all political parties but their own should be dissolved, they did not need Stalin.

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The Gestapo and OVRA owe nothing to GPU inspiration or methods. Information about the Russian labor camps on a large scale was received in Germany well after the Nazi concentration camps were established. Goebbels was impressed by Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin,* but there was never a Nazi film along similar lines. German academic research on the Soviet Union was well ahead of the rest of the world before 1933; when the Nazis came to power they closed down much of it and dismissed leading specialists – they simply had no interest in the subject. The picture drawn of Nazi fear-and-trembling before Soviet bestialities and Communist fanaticism is grossly exaggerated. The Nazis thought they would defeat the Soviet Union as easily as the German Communist party in 1933. Hitler and Goebbels did use the "Bolshevik danger" to frighten the German capitalists, and they regarded the Soviet Union as their enemy, but this is not exactly a sensational revelation.

Bolshevism was not "better" than fascism, but in certain important respects it was different. In the Soviet Union, as in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, terror and propaganda played a central role. There were many more-than skin-deep similarities among the three. Each had a monopolistic state party, and all three, to different degrees, belonged to the modern, totalitarian species of tyranny. The differences among them were conditioned by history, ideology, and social and cultural traditions. Furet is absolutely right in pointing to the common features of the totalitarian regimes, and those who dismissed them (and still continue to do so) were and are mistaken. Is it not pedantic to quibble about the extent and limits of the commonalities? The discussion has been going on for sixty years and may go at least for another sixty. If we could take for granted that fascism and Communism are things of the past, it would matter little. But neither are quite dead, and they may reappear in unfamiliar guises. Rauschning remarks that Hitler told him in 1934 that while Nazism would never become Communist, the Bolsheviks would gradually turn National Socialist. Whatever the origin of this comment, it was a remarkably astute observation. As we approach the end of the century, a convergence of fascism and Communism seems quite probable. What was (erroneously) stated in the past about "Red" and "Brown" Bolshevism or fascism may paradoxically come true in the future.

There is reason to assume that we shall be spared a second coming of Stalinism and Hitlerism. But the impulses which gave rise to fascism and Communism have by no means disappeared, and the so-called "objective conditions" are auspicious for the rise of a new synthesis of populism and nationalism. The weaknesses of Western societies are known and need not be reiterated in detail – the lack of cohesion in society, the social

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changes that give rise to ferment and uncertainty. With the weakening of the center, ethnic separatism flourishes, and individual and group interests become stronger than the common bonds. The connection itself between fascism and *fin-de-siècle* remains to be investigated in detail: on the one hand fascism as a reaction against "decadence"; on the other, the inspiration provided by it, with D'Annunzio as an obvious example. There are many others, such as Maurice Barrès (from decadence to the Action Française) and Julius Evola (from Dadaism to ultra-fascism). But *fin-de-siècle* is not what it used to be. Once it was Oscar Wilde, the *Yellow Book, Au rebours*, and Viennese impressionism. Now it is New Age and postmodernism as a philosophy and a cultural epoch. Perhaps the twentieth century did not deserve any better. The term *fin-de-siècle* first appeared in a comedy; now it has become a tragicomedy.

For reasons unknown, apocalyptic fears tend to grow towards the end of a century, and *a fortiori* a millenium. Having shown their inefficiency, there is the call to replace political parties by citizens' initiatives, perhaps with an occasional plebiscite – "direct" rather than representative democracy. Slogans stressing law and order and strong leadership become popular. The populists advocate a "third way" between capitalism and Communism. Their inspiration may be nationalist or religious-fundamentalist or a mixture of the two. Old-fashioned racialism is out as much as the cult of the Führer, but so is proletarian internationalism and Marxist doctrine. Communists and fascists are aware that they have to shed some of their cherished beliefs if they want to make a comeback anywhere in this world. And they also realize that they have to join forces. Not everyone on the extreme left (and right) will agree to collaborate with their erstwhile enemies. But the majority seems to be ready for such an alliance against the common enemy – the democrats, the liberals, the West. Those on the left and right unwilling to make such sacrifice will be reduced to sectarian insignificance.

Despite the Italian MSI, despite Le Pen and Haider, a fascist revival in democratic Europe seems less likely than in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and South Asia. The ultra-nationalist passions in Europe are spent. What is fascism without its fanaticism, its violence in the streets, torchlight parades, remilitarization, and wars of conquest? A second coming cannot be ruled out, but it would be a tame "defensive" fascism, and the old labels would no longer fit. Today's European fascists or para-fascists no longer wish to spend their money on big armies but rather want to keep out immigrants. They seek not empires but, at most, a "fortress Europe."

Chances are better in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union,

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where a "Red-Brown" alliance of Communists and ultra-patriots has in fact come into existence. Prospects are best in the Middle East and North Africa, and also elsewhere in the Third World. There fanatics can still be mobilized with much greater ease. Thirty thousand were killed in ideological battle in Algeria, compared with a few hundred in Italy and Germany prior to 1923 and 1933. The demographic weapon is formidable. At the end of World War II, Algeria had seven million inhabitants and Algiers, its capital, two hundred thousand. Today's figures are thirty-one million and two million respectively. It is true that in these areas the conditions which the demographic weapon gives rise to, poverty and unemployment, make it certain that any political system, however radical and aggressive, is bound to fail. But in our age of the means of mass destruction, it may fail only after a major disaster.

All this is not foreordained, and it seems to lead far beyond fascism and Bolshevism, beyond storm troopers and Black Shirts and the mustaches of Hitler and Stalin. And yet, Furet notes, "Bolshevism and National Socialism shared a veritable religion of power, overtly professed. In order to conquer the old and to maintain their power, all means are justified." World conquest is not now on the agenda, but the belief and the religion of power have not disappeared. The model of old-fashioned dictatorship no longer will work. To be effective in the modern world, tyranny will have to be in the fascist tradition.

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SUSAN HAACK

Multiculturalism and Objectivity

> "Truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be intolerable if it were either."
>
> [Algernon, in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.]

Multiculturalism seems such an engaging idea and yet, somehow, threatening. Why do I, like many people, feel so ambivalent about it? The explanation is not, after all, so hard to find: the term "multiculturalism" is multiply ambiguous. Sometimes it is used to refer to the kinds of societies where people from different cultural backgrounds live together, to characteristic problems that arise in such circumstances, and, sometimes, to the idea that the dominant culture should not impose unnecessarily on the sensibilities of minority culture(s) – *social multiculturalism*. Sometimes "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that it is desirable for students to know about other cultures than their own (sometimes, that it is especially desirable in multicultural societies in the sense just explained, for students to know something about the cultures of those with whom they live) – *pluralistic educational multiculturalism*. Sometimes, again, "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that students (especially, that students from minority groups in multicultural societies) should be educated in *their own* culture – *particularistic educational multiculturalism*. And sometimes "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that the dominant culture is not, or should not be, "privileged" (in the contemporary American context, this is often expressed as the claim that "Western culture" should not be privileged) – *philosophical multiculturalism*.

Already, since pluralistic and particularistic educational multiculturalism are in tension – if the latter is interpreted as suggesting that students should be educated *exclusively* in their own culture, they are downright incompatible – we have not only different, but potentially conflicting, uses. But it is impossible to avoid making matters even more complicated by identifying another dimension of ambiguity, this time in the term "culture." Some of the ambiguities are familiar: think of Snow's distinc-

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tion of the "two cultures," the scientific and the literary; think of the difference between "British culture" construed as referring to Shakespeare, Handel, Eliot, and so on, or as referring to soccer, fish and chips, warm beer, perennial miners' strikes, and so forth. Recall that, despite our membership in the Common Market, we British still have some difficulty thinking of ourselves, as opposed to those foreigners across the Channel, as "Europeans," but would agree with the French in finding the idea that American culture is "European" somewhat comical; and that "Europe" blurs together a great variety of racial types, languages, ways of life – as "Africa" does, or "Asia."

Beyond these familiar kinds of fuzziness, however, is a recent, crucial shift of meaning, a shift just barely hinted at in my characterization of philosophical multiculturalism. Initially, with philosophical multiculturalism, the contrast seems to be between the majority culture in a multicultural society and minority culture(s) – as it might be, between the majority Hindu culture of India, say, and Muslim and Christian minorities; or, in this country, between the *soi-disant* "European" culture of the majority (actually itself pretty varied), and many and varied not-even-distantly-European minority cultures. But of late "Western culture" has come to refer to anything associated with what is taken to be the dominant class of contemporary American society, and the theme is that *this* "culture" should not be privileged over the "cultures" of what are taken to be oppressed, marginalized, disadvantaged classes – classes identified in terms of color, sex, and sexual orientation. The scare quotes here are intended to signal that the term "culture" has been extended far beyond anything its ordinary elasticity permits; for, so far from respecting the usual contrast of culture with nature, we are now to take "black" or "female" as designating cultures.

Diane Ravitch, distinguishing pluralistic and particularistic conceptions of multiculturalism, urges the value of the former and the dangers of the latter. Daniel Bonevac, distinguishing liberal and illiberal multiculturalism, complains of a "bait and switch" operation replacing the liberal by the illiberal. Richard Bernstein writes of a *dérapage,* or slide, from a benign to an alarming kind of multiculturalism. Mary Lefkowitz distinguishes multiculturalism, of which she approves, from uniculturalism and anticulturalism, of which she does not. Lefkowitz's tripartite distinction reflects the fact that we need to accommodate both a shift from pluralism to particularism, and a shift from an ordinary, vague, ambiguous, but maybe just-barely-serviceable notion of differing and overlapping cultures, to the more-than-debatable notion of cultures of the dominant and the oppressed, "cultures" identified by race, sex, etc. – from multiculturalism

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to counter-culturalism, as I shall say. The first shift was already accommodated in my original fourfold distinction; accommodating the second shift gives us eight distinguishable positions; for example, besides philosophical multiculturalism, *philosophical counter-culturalism*. In principle, that is: in practice it is often far from clear which of these is being proposed. It is part of the particularists' strategy to blur the distinction between their position and the pluralists', and it is part of the counter-culturalists' strategy to blur the differences between their use of "Western culture" and more ordinary uses. Bernstein's word is certainly a good one for this conceptually slippery situation.

I mention social multiculturalism only to put it aside. It raises hard questions, even in the practically and morally more straightforward cases where social multiculturalism is not the result of conquest or a territorial decision imposed from outside, but of immigration: that Muslim girls in British schools should not be obliged to wear gym uniforms which are, by their standards, immodest, is easy enough, but it is very far from obvious that the same tolerance should extend to, say, recognition of polygamous marriages, or to banning *The Satanic Verses*. But such social and political questions fall outside the scope of this essay.

The claim of pluralistic educational multiculturalism is true. It *is* desirable for people to know about other cultures than their own. (As I write this sentence, though, newly struck by that deceptively straightforward-sounding phrase, "their own," I am reminded of Dewey's observation that "the typical American is himself . . . international and interracial in his makeup.") Pluralistic educational multiculturalism is desirable, but it is not easily achieved – a more-than-superficial knowledge of another culture is likely to require some fluency in another language; and it is not easily combined with ensuring that students acquire the other knowledge and skills they will need. Still, awareness that others do things differently and take different beliefs for granted helps one to discriminate the conventional from the non-conventional in one's own practice and thinking, to avoid the "rightly are they called 'pigs' " syndrome. And yes, knowledge of the customs of minority communities within a multicultural society can, surely, contribute to the accomplishment of a mutually tolerable, or, with good luck and good will, a mutually enriching, *modus vivendi*.

The claim of particularistic educational multiculturalism is false, and for some of the same reasons that pluralistic educational multiculturalism is true (and, for some of the same reasons that pluralistic educational multiculturalism is likely to contribute to mutual tolerance, particularistic educational multiculturalism runs the risk of contributing to mutual *in-*

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tolerance and resentment.) Sometimes particularistic educational multiculturalism is defended by appeal to the argument that it will raise students' self-esteem. But this is wrong-headed not only in its presupposition that raising students' self-esteem is a proximal goal of education but, more fundamentally, in its failure to acknowledge that a sense of self-worth is likely to be better founded on mastery of some difficult discipline than on ethnic boosterism, and that students can be inspired to achievement by the example of people of very different backgrounds from their own – as, for example, W. E. B. Dubois testifies that he was by his education in the classics of European literature.

Sometimes, again, particularistic educational multiculturalism is defended by appeal to the idea that students are unfairly disadvantaged unless they are educated in "their" cultural traditions. At the purely pragmatic level, this calls for a candid acknowledgment that children of immigrant parents are, on the contrary, likely to find themselves disadvantaged if their education does not make them familiar with the customs and practices of their new country. It also calls for a plain statement that it is surely untrue that only persons of Chinese descent can really master Confucius, or only persons of Greek descent, Homer, or only persons of French descent, Balzac, and so forth. I don't understand or appreciate Peirce any the less, for instance, because, unlike myself, he was American; nor Bacon any the more because, like myself, he was English.

Turning, now, to philosophical multiculturalism, I note that part of what is at stake may be the thought that when, as pluralistic educational multiculturalism reasonably urges, students are taught something of cultures other than their own, it should be *with respect*. It can be granted without further ado that all persons should be treated with respect; and that it is undesirable to encourage an attitude of suspicion or disrespect for what is unfamiliar merely because it is unfamiliar. But it doesn't follow, and neither is it true, that all opinions, practices, institutions, traditions, are equally deserving of respect. One of the benefits of knowing that others take for granted quite different opinions and practices than oneself is that it enables one to understand more of what is conventional and what is not in one's own practice and belief: a benefit that would be sacrificed by an uncritical relativism that found *all* comparisons to be odious.

Let me try to find an example that will not touch on any local sensibilities. I find much to admire in the life of the Kalahari bushmen: their closeness to the natural world, the vigor of their cave paintings, their delight in music and dancing, their taking for granted, in the extraordinary harshness of their conditions of life, that "if one eats, all eat." And

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thinking about the remarkable ingenuity of the triple-jointed poisoned arrows with which they hunt their game, I am set to wondering in a new way about what the social or intellectual conditions were that led to the rise of modern science in seventeenth-century Europe. But it doesn't follow, and neither is it true, that Bushman myths about the origin of the world or the causes of the seasons, and so forth, are on a par with the best scientific theorizing.

Rather than consider all four forms of counter-culturalism, allow me to turn my attention, now, directly to philosophical counter-culturalism. Further disambiguation is still needed, since the "privilege" that is being denied may be ethical, aesthetic, epistemological, or all three. Of these, I shall consider only the third, henceforth dubbed *epistemological counter-culturalism*. "Western culture," the thought is, has been largely the work of white, heterosexual men, and consequently gives an undeserved authority to *their* ways of knowing or seeing things, and serves *their* interests. The first phrase hints that there are black or female or homosexual "ways of knowing," an idea which seems to me not only false, but of the essence of racism or sexism; the second marks the connection with radical philosophies which deny the possibility of separating knowledge and power, inquiry and advocacy.

The point of epistemological counter-culturalism is to "contest" the [allegedly] undeserved [alleged] epistemic "privilege" of white males. Thus, Wahneema Lubiano tells us that "strong multiculturalism" is "not about the liberal tolerance of difference, but about the contestation of differences"; Mike Cole urges that multiculturalism "must push against the forces of oppression, be they centered on race, class, gender or all three"; and Naomi Scheman suggests that "a useful umbrella under which to shelter diverse projects [of "feminist epistemology"] would be that of 'anti-masculinism' by analogy with anti-racism," a link which, she continues, "points to the necessity for any feminist epistemology to be simultaneously committed to challenging the other sorts of bias that may be found within the dominant practices of acquiring, justifying, and accounting for knowledge."

Epistemological counter-culturalism rests on misconceptions about knowledge, society, power, and objectivity. These are, most importantly: first, that epistemic standards, standards of good evidence, justified belief, *bona fide* knowledge, are culture- or community-bound; and, second, that inquiry is inevitably disguisedly political. The first of these is dispiritingly skeptical in tendency, and the second is outright scary: if all inquiry really were political, there would be no difference between knowledge and propaganda, between inquiry and rhetorical bullying.

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Unfortunately, however, the fact that a thesis is dispiriting or scary is not in itself a reason for supposing it false; so it is necessary to articulate why these misconceptions *are* misconceptions.

Let me begin by distinguishing two projects in which epistemology may engage: articulating criteria of what constitutes justification of or good evidence for a belief, and giving guidelines for the conduct of inquiry. (Though these are frequently run together in contemporary epistemology, they are, though of course related, as different as criteria for judging roses are from instructions for growing them.)

One source of the first epistemological counter-culturalist thesis, that epistemic standards are culture- or community-bound, may have been the perception that neither of the traditionally rival theories of epistemic justification – foundationalism and coherentism – is acceptable, and the conviction that the only alternative is to resort to some kind of contextualism, according to which epistemic justification is context- or community-bound. Another source has been Kuhn's observation that proponents of rival scientific paradigms disagree even about what constitutes evidence, which has suggested the parallel conclusion, within the philosophy of science, that epistemic standards are paradigm-bound.

I agree that neither foundationalism nor coherentism will do. Foundationalism founders on its failure to identify a class of basic beliefs which could plausibly be claimed both to be justified exclusively by experience, and to be sufficient to support all other justified beliefs; coherentism founders on its failure, consistently with its claim that justification is a relation exclusively among beliefs, to acknowledge any role to experience in empirical justification. But contextualism is not the only, or the most plausible, alternative. A theory intermediate between foundationalism and coherentism, which allows the relevance of experience to empirical justification without requiring any beliefs to be justified by experience alone, and which allows pervasive mutual support among beliefs without requiring that empirical justification be a matter exclusively of relations among beliefs, can avoid the difficulties of both foundationalism and coherentism. In this intermediate theory (I call it, more accurately than euphoniously, "foundherentist"), the model of evidential support is – not, as much recent epistemology has supposed, a mathematical proof – but a crossword puzzle. The clues are the analogue of experiential evidence, and already-completed intersecting entries the analogue of reasons, of the subject's background beliefs.

Rather than suggesting the context- or paradigm-dependence of standards of evidence, this model suggests how deep-seated disagreement in background beliefs will give rise to diagreements about what evidence

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counts as relevant. Suppose you and I are working on the same crossword puzzle. You think, given your solution to 7 across, that the fact that a solution to 2 down ends in an "E" is evidence in its favor; I, given my solution to 7 across, that the fact that it ends in an "S" is evidence in its favor. There is no real relativity of standards; we are both trying to fit the entry to its clue and to other relevant entries. Compare the case where you and I are both on an appointments committee; you think this candidate should be ruled out on the grounds that his handwriting indicates he is not to be trusted; I think graphology is bunk and scoff at your "evidence." Once again, there is no real relativity of standards, only disagreement in background beliefs.

A distinction is called for here which parallels a hitherto-unremarked ambiguity in the counter-culturalists' talk of "privilege." Epistemological counter-culturalism may be straightforwardly relativist, maintaining that epistemic standards are not only community-bound, but also conventional, so that there is no sense to the question, whether these or those are better; or tribalist, maintaining that epistemic standards are community-bound, but that "ours" are best. Epistemological counter-culturalists of the former, relativist, stripe are committed to the claim that *no* standards, those of "Western culture" included, are privileged; those of the latter, tribalist, stripe are committed to the claim that *their,* non-"Western," standards are privileged.

Implicit in what has been said thus far, but needing to be made explicit, is the thought that an adequate epistemology will require a logical dimension (in its account of relations of evidential support); a personal dimension (in its recognition that you and I may believe the same thing, and yet I be justified and you unjustified, and that empirical justification depends ultimately on the subject's experience); and a dimension focused on human nature (in its recognition that our notion of the evidence of the senses presupposes that, for all normal human beings, the senses are a source of information about the world).

One source of the second epistemological counter-culturalist thesis, that knowledge is inherently political, has been the perception that inquiry is in some epistemologically important sense social. And in a sense, indeed, it is. Each of us, as a knowing subject, is pervasively dependent on others; and scientific inquiry has been as successful as it has in part because of its social character, of the cooperative and competitive engagement of many persons, both within and across generations. So, yes, let me add that an adequate epistemology will also require a social dimension (but, also, that none of "black" or "female" or "homosexual" can plausibly be supposed to identify an epistemic community).

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But these observations about the epistemic interdependence of knowing subjects and the social character of scientific inquiry, rather than suggesting the conclusion that knowledge is inherently political, suggest, on the contrary, that one of the (of course, fallible and imperfect) mechanisms by means of which bias gets detected and corrected – in scientific theorizing, and, though less systematically, in inquiry generally – is by means of competition between supporters of rival theories or approaches.

Another source of the idea that knowledge is inherently political has been the perception that racist, sexist, etc., ideas have sometimes come to be accepted, not because they were well-supported by evidence, but because of unjustifiable prejudices and preconceptions. (Hence the astonishing outbreak of sneer quotes – "knowledge," "fact," "evidence," "rationality," and so forth – in recent radical epistemology.) Racist or sexist ideas have, indeed, sometimes passed for known fact or established theory; and sometimes, no doubt, at least part of the explanation of how this came about is that those ideas' being accepted served the interests of the more powerful race or sex. But the inference from the true premise that what has passed for known fact or objective evidence is no such thing, to the conclusion that the notions of knowledge, fact, evidence, etc., are ideological humbug, is manifestly invalid. Indeed, this invalid inference – I call it *the "passes for" fallacy* – is not only fallacious, but also pragmatically self-defeating. For if, as the conclusion has it, the notions of knowledge, fact, relevant evidence, and so forth were really no more than ideological humbug, then the premise, that racist or sexist theories have sometimes been accepted on inadequate evidence, would itself be undermined.

In short, one can perfectly well acknowledge the shortcomings of foundationalism and coherentism, human inquirers' pervasive epistemic dependence on one another, the social character of scientific inquiry, the complexity and fallibility of all human cognitive activity, the corruption of some claims to truth, without being obliged to grant either that epistemic standards are community- or culture-relative, or that inquiry is invariably political.

One way to put it, using the vocabulary of "objectivity" and its several contrasts, would be this: a truth-claim is either true or else false, true or false objectively, that is, independently of whether you or I or anybody believes it. But there is of course no guarantee that all truth-claims are *true*. Standards of evidence are objective, that is, a person is more or less justified in believing something, and a scientific theory is more or less warranted, depending on how good his, or the, evidence is – and "how

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good," here, does *not* mean "how good by the standards of community C." But of course inquirers are not always perfectly objective, that is, they do not always seek out all the evidence they can, nor assess the worth of their evidence fairly.

"In order to reason well . . . , it is absolutely necessary to possess . . . such virtues as intellectual honesty and . . . a real love of truth." C. S. Peirce distinguished genuine inquiry from "sham reasoning," that is, pseudo-inquiry aimed not at finding the truth but at making a case for some conclusion fixed in advance. And if sham reasoning becomes commonplace, he predicted, people come "to look on reasoning as mainly decorative," and "man loses his conceptions of truth and of reasoning." And that, it seems to me, is the philosphical *débâcle* taking place before our eyes; genuine inquiry is so complex and difficult, and advocacy "research" has become so commonplace, that our grip on the concepts of truth and reason is being loosened – as the ubiquitous "passes for" fallacy, and all those dismissive sneer quotes, suggest.

This is to be much regretted; and not least because honest, thorough inquiry – reasoned pursuit of the truth – is the best defense against racist and sexist stereotypes. To the anticipated objection that reasoned pursuit of the truth is a "Western" ideal, I shall say only that, "Western" or not, it is an ideal of nearly incalculable value to humanity.

The appropriate philosophical response (after, of course, patiently pointing out that one could not discover by honest inquiry that there is no such thing as honest inquiry, that it could not be really-and-truly true that "truth" is no more than ideological humbug, etc.), is to try to articulate an epistemology which can recognize the subtleties of the structure of evidence and the complexity, revisability, and fallibility of inquiry. That, at any rate, is what I have tried to do.

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MARK POLIZZOTTI

When Breton Met Trotsky

On April 2, 1938, Breton and Jacqueline embarked from Cherbourg on the MS. *Orinoco,* bound for Veracruz, Mexico. In the headiness of travel preparations, Breton had readily abandoned the Gradiva gallery that ostensibly he still ran, entrusting Tanguy with the task of liquidating its assets and transferring its holdings to Jeanne Bucher's gallery. Nor did he have many qualms about leaving preparations for the next *Minotaure* to his fellow editors. For the latter, he nonetheless sent a hasty note from Cherbourg to be inserted in the upcoming issue: "The Mexico toward which I am heading, *Minotaure* that for once will appear without me – you know that in my mind these two words hold 'the place and the formula,' that they reveal two sides of the same truth."

With, presumably, more concern, Breton and Jacqueline also left behind the two-year-old Aube, who would spend the next four months in the care of André Masson, his wife, Rose, and their two young sons, in the Norman village of Lyons-la-Forêt. From the outset, and despite the good intentions of the little girl's hosts, Aube's stay presented problems. She first suffered what appears to have been a serious intestinal ailment, which started with the Bretons' departure and lingered throughout April, then came down with a bad case of bronchitis in June. What troubled Aube more than her physical illnesses, of course, was the prolonged absence of "Ada and Zacline," as she called her parents. As Masson reported, she at first refused to believe that they had gone away at all: "She always insists that you're nearby: behind the door . . . or at the edge of the forest, near the garden," he wrote on April 14. Then, once Aube had understood the situation, she refused to hear any more about them. With scarcely concealed disapproval, Rose Masson watched as the toddler's sadness slowly turned into deep resentment. "To be honest, I've stopped talking to her about you," she told Breton and Jacqueline in May. "I'd noticed that she was troubled, worried, and depressed . . . I'm a little tormented by all this." And she warned them not to be surprised if Aube spurned them on their return: "If her childish whims tell her otherwise, no matter what we do, she won't open her arms to you."

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Whatever regret the Bretons might have felt over their daughter, however, seems to have been outshone by their experience in Mexico – both the splendor that awaited them on arrival and the mishaps that accompanied them. On April 18, the couple arrived in what Breton dubbed "the Surrealist place par excellence," to be welcomed by a lone, bemused functionary from the French Embassy. Despite the official invitation, it soon became clear that the embassy had made no provisions for lodgings. Furious, with only a few francs and return passage in his pocket, Breton was ready to take the *Orinoco* back to France then and there, but at that moment, the Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera, also in Veracruz to meet the Bretons, stepped up and offered them the use of his own home for the duration of their stay. He also carried a message from his friend and mentor Leon Trotsky, inviting Breton to visit in several days' time.

At the age of fifty-one, Rivera was the most famous Mexican artist of his generation, a national legend whose paintings and murals earned him a comfortable living at home and numerous commissions abroad (not all of them successful: five years earlier in New York, a celebrated controversy had erupted when Nelson Rockefeller, who had hired Rivera to decorate the RCA Building, destroyed the work because Rivera had included a likeness of Lenin). It was Rivera who had persuaded Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas to welcome Trotsky after his expulsion from France. And it was he who now lodged the exiled revolutionary – along with his wife, Natalia, their grandson, and numerous bodyguards and secretaries – in the so-called Blue House in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán, which was owned by Rivera's wife, Frida Kahlo.

Grateful for the rescue, Breton and Jacqueline moved into the upper floor of the Riveras' home in the fashionable suburb of San Angel. Jacqueline later described it as "one of the most modern houses of the time: two white cubes half made of glass, linked by an outside stairway without a banister and a passageway at the top . . . An Indian woman, the caretaker, prepared the family meals in the garden over a wood fire; quite visible beneath the trees, and in complete freedom, ran a giant anteater" – Breton's totem animal. Breton, delighted with the accommodations, excitedly wrote Péret: "Everything is marvelous, life with Diego and Frieda Rivera [*sic*] is as fascinating as can be."

Breton took an immediate liking to the stout, jovial muralist, and even more of one to Frida Kahlo. He was impressed upon discovering Kahlo's violent, allegorical paintings, which combined a Mexican iconography with Bosch-like overtones – seeing them, Breton immedi-

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ately declared her a Surrealist – and was entranced by the woman herself. Swarthy and appealing, her mestizo features highlighted by the peasant dresses she wore, the thirty-year-old Kahlo (as one Surrealist later said) "fit completely the Surrealist ideal of woman. She had a theatrical quality, a high eccentricity. She was always very consciously playing a role and her exoticism immediately attracted attention." Kahlo, however, found Breton pompous, arrogant, and boringly intellectual. "The trouble with El Señor Breton is that he takes himself so seriously," she told friends, and privately referred to him as the "old cockroach." Nor did she entirely appreciate his labeling her a Surrealist. "I never knew I was a Surrealist until André Breton came to Mexico and told me I was one," she archly wrote. "I myself still don't know what I am." She appears to have felt more solidarity with Jacqueline, another woman artist in a distinctly male world.

If Breton's presence in Mexico barely made an impression on French Embassy functionaries, this was not the case with the local journalists. From the moment of his arrival, he was asked to grant interviews to the newspapers, giving him the chance once again to define Surrealism's objectives for a new audience, while other periodicals ran capsule histories of the movement and translations of Breton's writings. "Breton has been here for a few days, full of admiration for the country, Diego's paintings, for all the beautiful things in this country. On the other hand he goes from banquets to official receptions, he is beset by a multitude of people," Trotsky's private secretary, Jean van Heijenoort, wrote to Pierre Naville in Paris.

Even more attentive were the Stalinists, who regarded Breton's visit with evident suspicion. As Breton later recounted, one French Communist organization had preceded his arrival with a letter to the major Mexican writers and artists, calling him a "propaganda envoy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Apparently, Aragon also wrote a letter urging the Mexican Stalinists to "systematically sabotage any work which [Breton] might undertake in Mexico." Breton shrugged off these charges as an annoyance, one that his past record would easily belie, but his Mexican hosts took the implied threat quite seriously.

Trotsky himself, meanwhile, greeted the news of Breton's visit with high interest. Increasingly isolated, he knew that Breton had strategic value as one of the few French intellectuals openly to endorse him at the time; he later told a friend, who was surprised by the Russian's welcome of the Surrealist poet, that "he could not afford to be sectarian in ideological matters when allies were so hard to come by." But Trotsky also seems to have been genuinely touched by the admiration Breton had shown over the past years, and impressed in turn by the man's intellectual

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reputation. According to Jean van Heijenoort, he immediately began planning for the Surrealist to spearhead an independent writers' federation in France, as a counter to similar Communist organizations in Europe and America. Before Breton's arrival, he had also requested some of his books in order to acquaint himself with Surrealism. American art critic Meyer Schapiro sent the first *Manifesto, Nadja, The Communicating Vessels*, and probably *Mad Love* from New York – although when they arrived, Trotsky left them unread on his desk for several weeks, and leafed through them only at the last minute. Finally, through Heijenoort, Trotsky made inquiries about Breton to Naville in Paris, who sent back a generally favorable report.

By the time of the two men's meeting, therefore, Trotsky was fairly well versed in Breton's thinking (well enough, in any case, to make Breton feel that he had read his books attentively) and favorably disposed toward the Surrealist leader. Early in May, he warmly welcomed Breton to the Blue House on Avenida Londres, with its "plant-filled patio, cool rooms, collections of pre-Columbian art, and countless paintings": the house in which Trotsky had lived and worked for the past year and a half. "We were all very moved," Jacqueline recalled, "even L. D. [for Leon Davidovich Trotsky]. We immediately felt welcomed with open arms."

As for Breton, his admiration for the fifty-eight-year-old revolutionary bordered on hero worship. "My heart beat fast as I watched the gates to the Blue House open," he told a Trotskyist group once back in Paris:

> I was led through the garden, with too little time to view the bougainvillea whose pink and violet flowers thrust themselves from the soil, the endless cacti, the stone idols assembled along the paths with loving care by Diego Rivera . . . I found myself in a well-lit room that was filled with books. Comrades, at the moment I saw Comrade Trotsky, standing at the center of this room, my mind's image of him was overwhelmed by a real one. I could not repress the impulse to tell him I was astonished to find him so young . . . The deep blue eyes, the remarkable face, the abundant silver locks, the florid complexion, made up a *masque* on which one feels that an inward peace has enabled him, and will continue to enable him, to prevail against the cruelest misfortune . . . As his visage becomes animated, as his hands express with extraordinary finesse this or that remark, he radiates from his whole person something electrifying.

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It was, said Breton, like having "an entire section of the revolution" materialize before him.

The first meeting, which lasted several hours, touched mainly on informational topics. In fluent if accented French, Trotsky inquired about reactions in Paris to the Moscow Trials, and about the activities of Malraux and Gide, whom Trotsky had vainly tried to entice to Mexico several months earlier. Heijenoort and several others sat in on the conversation, and one of Trotsky's American aides took photographs: "On some of them," said Jacqueline, "one can see André's face in a state of tension, emotion, and wondrous, almost painful surprise." Later, Natalia Trotsky served tea. Breton, who despised the beverage, nonetheless deemed that "under these conditions, it was drinkable."

Nearly fifteen years later, Breton still marveled at Trotsky's "prodigious mental organization which allowed him for example to dictate three texts simultaneously," as well as his ability "to relate every small observation to a larger fact, to bend it – without this ever seeming forced or artificial – toward the hope of redefining world values." In this, there might have been some share of exaggeration: Heijenoort, for example, has said that the "diligent and concentrated" Trotsky hated doing more than one thing at a time. But more than objective fact, Breton's recollection expresses the veneration that he would carry with him for the rest of his life. Trotsky, meanwhile, was sufficiently impressed to tell *Partisan Review,* the leftist New York quarterly, that Breton was "artistically and politically not only independent from the Stalinists but absolutely hostile to them."

Still, and despite the mutual admiration, it was inevitable that the vast formative and cultural differences between the two men should lead to occasional disputes. "No matter how great our deference," Breton later remarked of himself and Rivera, "and despite the care we took to contradict [Trotsky] as little as possible, we couldn't entirely avoid banding together out of an 'artistic' temperament that was fundamentally alien to him."

Some of these differences surfaced during a second meeting, on May 20, when Trotsky broached the issue of literature. Unlike Breton, Trotsky had never devoted much thought to the subject; his one work on it, *Literature and Revolution,* now seemed to him to belong "to an almost prehistoric time." Moreover, his literary tastes did not extend past the nineteenth century, and particularly the novels of the great realists. "When I read Emile Zola," he said to Breton's dismay, "I enter into a broader reality." Breton stiffened in his chair, finally admitting in a

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pinched voice that Zola might have some merit after all. Nor did Trotsky understand Breton's love of Sade and Lautréamont; and although he admired Freud, he distrusted Surrealism's particular approach to psychoanalysis (much like Freud himself). "Are you trying to smother the conscious with the unconscious?" he asked. Finally, he questioned Breton's interest in objective chance, even though the notion had originated with Engels. Breton explained his view of the unconscious as a tool for social liberation, but Trotsky, though partly swayed, accused him of trying to "keep open a little window on the beyond."

Nonetheless, as Breton later noted, these "fleeting disagreements" could not "damage the basic harmony" of the two men's relations. Jacqueline, who followed her husband's interviews with Trotsky, also remembered the predominantly cordial tone of their discussions:

> L. D.'s readings were very classical . . . and this gap separated them. In André, it provoked moments of despair. It must have been the same for L. D. when it came to André's political gaps. And yet, the points of convergence were innumerable. They shared the same love of and respect for nature, the same joy, the same intensity of life, the same will to change the world – each in his own way, of course, but in the end it was the same. Both had the same violence of thought and opinion. What André most admired in L. D. were his rigor, his commitment, his passion, and his purity.

Jacqueline also saw in both of them a "great power of fascination and seduction," as well as a "respectful, polite, generally deferent" – and more than a little old-fashioned – attitude toward women: Breton maintained a lifelong custom (long out of date, even in his childhood) of kissing women's hands; and Trotsky could not tolerate a woman smoking or wearing makeup. Needless to say, Jacqueline and Frida were generally excluded from the men's conversations, and instead played Surrealist and children's games together in a corner of the room.

Over the course of Breton's four-month stay, he and Trotsky held eight or ten such discussions, most of them during various trips taken together (both to provide a more pleasant context and to satisfy Breton's touristic desires). If this seems few, it should be remembered that more frequent contact was made difficult not only by the Russian's schedule – apart from seeing Breton in these months, he composed several major articles, worked on a huge book about Stalin, and kept his hand in various political arrangements – but also by the security measures he had to observe. Trotsky knew that the Soviet secret police had standing orders

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to kill him and his family. A mere two months before Breton's arrival, they had murdered his son, Leon Sedov, in a Paris clinic; and attempts on his own life were so likely that Rivera had installed a guard booth in front of the Blue House. All visitors (with Rivera the sole exception) were required to make appointments in advance, while road trips involved an entourage of twelve or more in several cars. Given these precautions, the tragedy that had recently visited Trotsky, and his ongoing preoccupations, the ten or so meetings granted Breton bear witness to the sincere interest "L. D." took in his foreign guest.

When not seeing Trotsky, Breton spent his time with Rivera, traveling throughout the countryside and meeting numerous Mexican intellectuals. He continued to grant interviews to the newspapers, one of which quoted him declaring that "war seems inevitable, and the most we can hope for is that it will inspire more opponents than the last one, who will take advantage of the situation to lead the masses in overthrowing capitalism, of which it is the result." And he attempted to fulfill his official duties as a lecturer: he briefly spoke at the opening of an art exhibit, prefaced the Mexican premiere of *Un Chien Andalou,* and on May 13 delivered the first of several scheduled lectures at the Universidad Nacional in Mexico City, on "modern transformations in art and Surrealism." Trotsky, fearing disruptions by the local Stalinists, instructed his followers to post themselves around the amphitheater.

As it happened, Breton's first lecture proved to be his last: soon afterward, the rector who was sponsoring his speeches resigned, and the embassy, preoccupied with an attempted coup against President Cárdenas, had little time to redesign Breton's schedule. Moreover, after his talk at the university, Breton found himself the subject of several hostile articles in the press, which dismissed Surrealism as an "ivory tower." Despite rebuttals by Rivera, Breton was stripped of his official mission in June. He gave one last public address, a poetry reading on June 26, and then no more for the rest of his stay.

In the end, it was a small loss: the cancellation of further lectures now left him free to tour Mexico and see Trotsky. During the months of June and July, he and the exiled Bolshevik explored Toluca, Cuernavaca, Tenayuca, Calixtlahuaco, and other magnificent villages full of Mexican and Indian lore. They visited the volcano Popocatepetl and scaled the pyramids of Xochicalco. One evening, in a small town, Trotsky took advantage of his guests to permit himself a rare treat: going to the movies. Despite Rivera's entreaties to keep his face covered, Trotsky – accompanied by Natalia, Breton, Jacqueline, and a dozen bodyguards and assistants – watched the dubbed, third-rate Western with consum-

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mate enjoyment, "laughing, commenting in whispers to everyone about the film's plot and form."

He and Breton also indulged in a mutual passion for the outdoors: strolling in the country, fishing for *axolotls,* hunting for butterflies. "It was all very merry," recalled Jacqueline. "They both fished with their hands. They took off their shoes, rolled up their trousers, and stepped into water that was often ice-cold . . . During their long walks they marveled at nature. I remember their conversations on the beauty of butterflies . . . It was a complete surprise for André, who certainly hadn't expected L. D. to be interested in butterflies."

But as with their initial discussions, not all the contacts were quite so harmonious. Breton later recounted how Trotsky watched disdainfully as he and Rivera combed the small village for pre-Columbian figurines – one interest the Russian did not share – representing voluptuous, ornately sculpted nudes. And Heijenoort recalled Trotsky's anger when, one afternoon in a village church, Breton discovered the marvelously decorated votive plates left by several generations of townspeople. Full of admiration for these examples of popular art, Breton "started to slip some of the votive offerings, perhaps half a dozen, under his jacket. He felt even fewer scruples by virtue of the fact that it was a church, and he perhaps even considered his act to be a legitimate expression of anticlericalism." (This was, after all, the same man who had defended Malraux's theft of idols in the Temple of Angkor in 1924.) Trotsky, however, who did not appreciate this form of sacrilege, and who moreover feared that the incident could be used to discredit him, was furious – although for once he held his tongue.

For his part, Breton was outraged when Trotsky (keeping open his own "little window on the beyond") referred to a favorite dog as his "friend" and asked Breton whether he didn't think the animal had a "human look." Shocked by Trotsky's animism, Breton retorted that calling a dog "friendly" was just as senseless as saying a mosquito was "cruel" or a crayfish "reactionary." But Trotsky clung to his position, finally concluding with a laugh that only a third creature, "half dog, half man," could settle the debate. Breton remained annoyed by the incident, and on his return to Paris he fumed to Luis Buñuel: "Can you imagine how someone like Trotsky could possibly say such a stupid thing? A dog doesn't have a human look! A dog has a dog's look!"

But the most pronounced dispute between the two men concerns not a point of ideological divergence but a project on which they agreed: Trotsky's plan for a federation of revolutionary artists. It was during their second talk, on May 20, that Trotsky had spoken of such a

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group, which he hoped would "gather representatives of the various non-Stalinist revolutionary movements" into a unified front. Trotsky thought that the project should be inaugurated with a manifesto, and he had asked Breton to draft one. In the several weeks following, however, Breton had found himself too intimidated to write anything at all, and the delay soon began to anger the exacting elder comrade. "Breton, with Trotsky breathing down his neck, felt completely paralyzed," wrote Heijenoort. 'Have you something to show me?' Trotsky would ask whenever they met. As the situation developed, Trotsky assumed the role of the schoolmaster before a Breton playing the recalcitrant pupil who had not done his homework." Breton was so mortified that he even asked Heijenoort to draft the manifesto in his stead, but Heijenoort declined.

Trotsky's wrath had finally exploded one day in early June, during a car trip to Guadalajara. The details of the argument have never been made clear, but it evidently had to do with Breton's delays and Trotsky's impatience. Breton obliquely evoked "the misunderstanding on the road to Guadalajara" in a subsequent letter to Trotsky: "At the time . . . I was no less offended than you, because I could not accept that Trotsky should ascribe to me, even under the most contradictory appearances, motivations completely opposed to the ones I have always felt towards him." In the middle of the argument itself, Trotsky's car suddenly pulled to a halt and Breton, with a look of "baffled astonishment," walked back toward a second vehicle following behind. He passed the rest of the 500-mile journey exiled in this second car with Jacqueline and Frida, while Heijenoort replaced him next to a "stiff and silent" Trotsky in the front vehicle. During the several days they stayed in Guadalajara, Breton did not once see Trotsky.

Instead, he and Rivera had spent their time indulging their "artistic temperaments," like schoolboys playing hooky. They went in search of paintings and antiquities to a run-down private museum, where they were guided by a "pathetic and likable" old man who asked to be paid only in lottery tickets (he had, he proudly informed his guests, already spent 26,000 piasters on such tickets without ever winning). Swarms of impoverished families went about their business in the courtyard, and on the upper balcony an elegantly dressed young man sang at the top of his lungs. "All of Mexico was there," Breton later wrote. During the trip, Breton also discovered the earthy, powerful photographs of Manuel Alverez Bravo, some of which he published in *Minotaure* the following year. And while visiting a dilapidated mansion – which he dubbed the "Slum Palace" – he was wonderstruck by "an admirable sixteen- or sev-

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enteen-year-old creature, ideally disheveled, who had come to open the door," and whom he soon noticed was naked under a shredded evening gown. "The fascination she exerted on me at that moment was such that I forgot to ask what she was doing there," he wrote. "No matter: so long as she was there I cared nothing about her origins; I was completely satisfied merely to give thanks for her existence. *Such is beauty.*"

Once back in Mexico City, Breton and Trotsky patched up their differences, and Breton tried once again to face his manifesto. He labored over the following weeks to shape his and Trotsky's shared ideas on art and politics into a statement worthy of the great revolutionary and of his projected federation – although it appears that no real progress was made until mid-July.

In the meantime, at the beginning of that month, Breton, Trotsky, Rivera, and entourage spent several days on the isle of Pátzcuaro, in the state of Michoacán. For the evenings, the three men had planned a series of talks about art and politics, which they intended to publish jointly under the title "Conversations in Pátzcuaro." Conflicts again arose when discussion turned to the society of the future. Breton maintained that not even a classless society would eliminate conflict (a thesis Trotsky refused to hear); and Trotsky, who dominated the conversation, asserted that in the society of the future art would simply disappear: instead of paintings or dance, houses would be beautifully decorated and people would move harmoniously. "Don't you think that there will always be people who will want to paint a small square of canvas?" a worried Breton asked Heijenoort after Trotsky had gone to bed. In any case, the "Conversations in Pátzcuaro" went no further: after the first evening, Breton came down with a fever and an attack of laryngitis, leaving him voiceless for several days – by which time an annoyed Trotsky had returned to Mexico City.

The fact was, this was no mere illness, but a manifestation of the almost paralyzing awe Breton felt in Trotsky's presence. Breton himself recognized as much, and in a moving letter to Trotsky written just after his departure from Mexico, he spoke of the "inhibition to which I've fallen victim, each time it was a matter of trying to do something along your lines and before your eyes":

> This inhibition is mainly a product, as I'd like at all costs for you to understand, of the boundless admiration I have for you . . . Very often I've wondered what would happen if, by some impossible chance, I found myself facing one of the men on whom I've modeled my thinking and sensibility: Rimbaud, say, or Lautréamont. All of a sud-

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> den I felt oddly stripped of my abilities, prey to a kind of perverse need to hide. It's what I call for my own personal use, in memory of King Lear, my "Cordelia complex." Please don't laugh at me, it's utterly innate, organic. I have every reason to believe it is ineradicable.

It was this "Cordelia complex" which kept Breton from pursuing formalized discussions with Trotsky in Pátzcuro and prevented him from drafting a text that, normally speaking, would have cost him little effort.

Finally, after his return from Pátzcuaro, Breton was able to make progress on the manifesto. Although the first paragraphs were somewhat halting (as the original manuscript shows, they were substantially rewritten before publication), he soon found the correct tone, and the majority of his first draft does not significantly differ from the final version. Heijenoort described the composition of the text at that point: "[Breton] gave Trotsky a few sheets of paper covered with his tiny handwriting. Trotsky dictated a few pages in Russian, to be combined with Breton's text. I translated Trotsky's pages into French and then showed them to Breton. After more talk, Trotsky took all of the texts, cut them, added a few passages, and pasted everything into a long roll. I typed the resulting French, translating Trotsky's Russian and keeping Breton's prose. This was the text on which they reached final agreement."

The manifesto, finally dated July 25, 1938, and titled "For An Independent Revolutionary Art," addressed all leftist intellectuals who refused to follow the call of Stalinism. "The aim of this appeal is to find a common ground on which may be reunited all revolutionary writers and artists, the better to serve the revolution by their art and to defend the liberty of that art itself against the usurpers of the revolution," wrote Trotsky, his years of polemical directness coming to the fore. Condemning the repression of progressive art by both the fascists and the Stalinists, he announced the formation of an "International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art" (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant, or FIARI), which he opened to "every friend and defender of art."

Breton, meanwhile, took a more theoretical approach: "Any philosophical, sociological, scientific, or artistic discovery seems to be the fruit of a precious *chance,* that is to say, the manifestation, more or less spontaneous, of *necessity* . . . It follows that art cannot, without degenerating, bend itself to any foreign directive and obediently fill the parameters that some believe they can assign it, for the benefit of extremely shortsighted pragmatic goals . . . To those who would urge us, whether

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for today or for tomorrow, to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal." In what might be considered an excess of zeal, Breton had also thought to include Trotsky's own former prescription: "Complete freedom for art, *except against the proletarian revolution*." But Trotsky, who too often had seen this latter caveat misused by the proponents of Socialist Realism, himself deleted the final clause – bringing the statement into line not only with his current thinking but with Breton's own writings as well. The manifesto concluded with Breton's twin injunction: "Our aims: The independence of art – for the revolution; The revolution – for the complete liberation of art!"

"For an Independent Revolutionary Art" condensed and focused many of the discussions on art and politics that had taken place between the two authors during their recent contacts. In many ways it demonstrates a remarkable concordance of ideas, and stands, as one critic has pointed out, as one of the few examples in history of a joint statement by a political theorist and a poet. At the same time, the manifesto shows the basic differences between Trotsky the pragmatist and Breton the quasi-utopian. For although both men agreed that art had suffered under the bourgeoisie, Trotsky's comments on art as "expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time" inevitably call to mind his earlier remarks that art would ultimately disappear when life itself better responded to those needs. Whereas Breton, here as elsewhere, conceived of a future society in which the unconscious energies of desire would be allowed to blossom into ever more daring, ever more otherworldly forms of art.

Moreover, it is indicative that this manifesto, the crowning achievement and most durable trace of Breton's visit to Mexico, should be a statement about the role of the *artist* rather than a political tract – even though Breton had written many purely political statements during his thirteen years of social involvement. By meeting Trotsky on the literary terrain, Breton reinforced the vision he'd had of him since 1925: as a masterful writer and thinker, rather than as the ruthless bureaucrat to which much of his career bore witness. For his part – and notwithstanding the respect he felt for Breton, which had been visibly enhanced by their contacts – Trotsky underscored the attitude that had always followed the Surrealist leader in his dealings with scientists and politicians, from Freud to Léon Blum: that in the final account, André Breton remained a poet, and his domain that of aesthetics.

Trotsky further highlighted this attitude when he insisted that the manifesto should be co-signed not by himself, but by Diego Rivera, who

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had actually had little or no hand in its composition. In part, as Breton later stressed, this was because his status as a refugee prohibited him from engaging in overt political action (although it clearly did not prevent him from writing numerous polemical articles during his stay in Mexico). But it was also because Trotsky believed that the manifesto on *art* should be signed by two artists.

With the manifesto completed, it was time for Breton finally to leave Mexico. He and Trotsky bade each other a warm farewell at the end of July, "on the sun-drenched patio of the Blue House in Coyoacán, amidst cactus, orange trees, bougainvillea, and idols." Trotsky disappeared into the house and returned with the original manuscript of "For an Independent Revolutionary Art," which he presented to his co-author as a gift – the only time, said Heijenoort, that Trotsky had ever given away one of his manuscripts. Breton, profoundly moved, gave Trotsky in return a portrait of himself by Man Ray, with the inscription: "To Leon Trotsky, in commemoration of the days spent in his light, with my absolute admiration and devotion."

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

You might not have suspected it, from the torrent of press lavished on the Bruce Nauman retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and the most recent incarnation of the Whitney Biennial, but there were also "straight" painting shows in New York last season that rewarded attention – a catholic selection that leapfrogged from seventeenth-century Flanders to 1920s Italy to 1950s New York to the present.

The biggest surprise may have been the exhibition of paintings by Peter Paul Rubens at Gagosian Gallery – uptown – partly because, to date, the gallery has been associated exclusively with blue chip modernism, and partly because both the show and its handsome, informative (if overpriced) catalogue by David Freedberg were really excellent. There were no heroic altarpieces, no opulent, fleshy mythological scenes, no roiling lion hunts. Most of the canvases were familiar; the elegant, meticulous portraits of a fashionably dressed couple, possibly Rubens's sister-in-law and her husband; the Titian-esque portrait of a muscular man in armor; and the vigorously brushed head of a ruddy-cheeked young member of the Gonzaga family, Rubens's chief patrons in Italy (a fragment of an altarpiece commissioned during his sojourn there at the beginning of his career) were all seen last year in the stunning *Age of Rubens* exhibit in Boston and Toledo, Ohio. But since even relatively modest, "domestic" paintings by the Antwerp master are in short supply in this country, the selection at Gagosian was a treat.

As is often the case, even in ambitious museum exhibits, the show's oil sketches stood out not only for the loose, unfinished quality that makes them especially appealing to twentieth century eyes, but for their vigor, their directness, and their assuredness. Painted to develop ideas, to provide models for assistants, or to show patrons what they might expect, the oil sketches offer the most intimate view possible of a painter known for his dazzling public "performances" and demonstrate the true brilliance of his bravura touch. The star of the show was a colored oil sketch of the four Evangelists, from a British private collection, a model for one of a set of tapestries woven in Brussels for a convent in Madrid. A masterpiece of dynamic High Baroque composition, the sketch packs Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and their attributes – a levitating angel, a labrador-size lion, a discreetly withdrawn ox, and an immense eagle –

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into a tight, self-contained swirl that seems to extend outwards, through the direction of gaze or the implication of gesture, in every possible direction. As is often true in works by the erudite Rubens, the iconography is complex, theologically and art historically – the twisted columns that frame the scene, as it is "revealed" by *putti* who raise curtains, refer, for example, both to Raphael's Vatican tapestries and Solomon's temple in Jerusalem – but the real drama of this wonderful little picture derives from the interplay of restless drapery, pulsing forms, and rapid, authoritative brushwork. As in Rodin's celebrated *Burghers of Calais,* the tight, confining geometry of the grouping accentuates the sense of contained but irrepressible energy. It's how the burghers might have looked, if instead of being worn down by siege and starvation, they had been able to rush triumphantly out of their city to confront their captors.

In the handful of years that it has been on 57th Street, Paolo Baldacci Gallery has been educating Americans about what really happened in Italy between the years of Futurism and *Arte Povera*. Exhibitions of serious artists too little known on this side of the Atlantic, such as the sculptors Arturo Martini and Fausto Melotti, or of too little seen works by well-known artists, such as Giorgio De Chirico and Giorgio Morandi, have filled conspicuous gaps. The spring show of pictures by Alberto Savinio, a key figure in the evolution of Italian modernism who is virtually unknown here, was the latest in the series. Savinio, a musician and theorist as well as a painter, helped, together with his brother, De Chirico, to create and define the elusive movement known as the *Scuola Metafisica* in the 1920s. Like his brother, too, Savinio was an important force in the publication most closely associated with the movement, *Valori Plastici*. His paintings may be, ultimately, more compelling for what they tell us about the ideals of the *Scuola Metafisica* than for their intrinsic merits, but they are fascinating in relation to De Chirico's better-known pictures of the same period. Like De Chirico, Savino exploits classicizing references and evokes a persuasive dream-like mood, but the space he constructs in his paintings is usually more open, unbounded, and ambiguous than in his brother's. Savinio is less of a colorist than De Chirico at his best, but, in some ways, he is more experimental, "collaging" together images drawn from a host of sources – including photographs of distant places and peoples – and "appropriating" motifs in a surprisingly contemporary fashion. At best, his pictures have an engaging ambiguity; at worst, they slip into typical European perverse Surrealism. It may be significant, though, that one of the best paintings in the show was a relatively straightforward, drawing-like portrait of the

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Untitled (The Artist's Mother with Adele and Giorgio; 1927) by Alberto Savinio. Oil on canvas. 31 and 3/4 inches by 39 and 1/4 inches. Courtesy of Paolo Baldacci Gallery Ltd.

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artist's mother, sister, and brother, with a classicizing landscape behind them, their faces improbably colored, like Hindu gods. The picture occupies a zone somewhere between the turn-of-the-century formal photograph that must have inspired the painting and a 1920s neo-classical Picasso; judging from the provocative information provided by the show and the texts at Baldacci, I suspect that both of these sources – and more – undoubtedly came into play. Is Savinio a major painter? No. But knowing something of his work expands our sense of the complexity of the evolution of twentieth-century art.

David McKee Gallery can be relied on to show fine examples of Philip Guston's work, intelligently selected, and thoughtfully grouped. The recent exhibition of paintings (and a few drawings) from the 1950s was no exception. The full range of Guston's pictorial and emotional inventiveness came through, in a small but comprehensive selection of paradigmatic abstract works. At one end of the spectrum was a dense, dark, horizontal red picture whose underlying geometry seemed to hark back to the tightly constructed, crowded figure paintings that established Guston's reputation in the 1940s; for all its layered surface of concealment and retrieval, the painting was nonetheless calm and solemn, the way a Renaissance fresco can be – not a far-fetched comparison, since it was painted not long after Guston's extended stay in Italy on a Rome Prize. At the other extreme was a potent, fierce vertical image from the late fifties in which writhing, soft-edged blocks of muddy primary colors, blacks, and harsh pinks seemed to struggle to the surface, through a dense, brushy atmosphere of turbulent grays; Guston's overscaled touch seemed at once brutal and delicate, as though he deposited pigment on the surface with simultaneous effort and tenderness. Like other paintings of these years, it seemed unstable, to happen while you watched, and at the same time, to be absolutely inevitable.

Between these two poles were luminous pictures from the early fifties, expanses of creamy rose, heated pinks, and cadmium oranges, seemingly woven out of rhythmically piled brushstrokes. Guston's paintings of this type are often called lyrical. I'm not sure why, since they are as tense and as much about process, imminence, and struggle as any of the later works, despite their more orderly *facture*. Even the single "white" painting of the show, one of the best, seemed as tragic as the rest. The repetitive, overlapped strokes made visible and almost tangible the painting's history, a slow process of accretion and cancellation; touches of pale pigment veiled and obscured tattered patches of more brilliant color, the way fog or fading light does.

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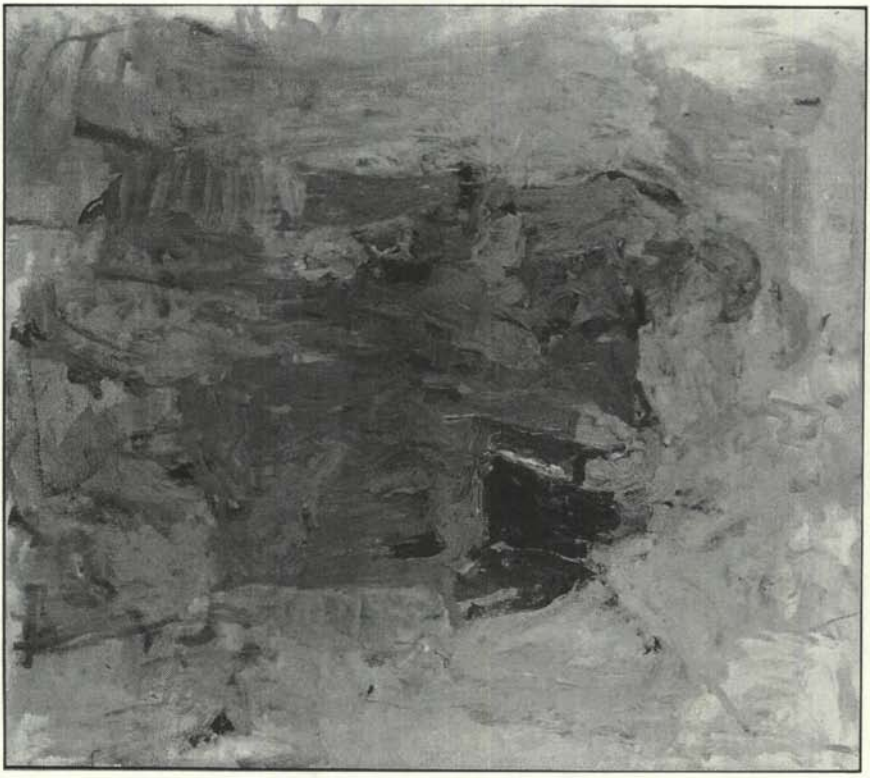

The Mirror (1957) by Philip Guston. Oil on canvas. 68 by 60 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of McKee Gallery.

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Guston's late "cartoon-image" paintings have attracted a great deal of attention. Among other things, they have been appropriated as indications of the failure of abstraction, so that it is doubly important to be reminded of just how potent an abstract painter he was. For one thing, it is obvious that whether he used recognizable images or not, the painterly issues – touch, layering, edge, materiality – were of primary importance to Guston and crucial to the emotional impact of his art. For another, the seriousness and intensity of the best pictures at McKee affirmed that far from being evidence of a rupture within Guston's work, his late paintings simply made explicit things that had been implicit all along.

The quirky miniature Kenneth Noland retrospective at Castelli's West Broadway space provided another opportunity to look freshly at a painter too frequently identified by only a fragment of his achievement. By omitting any of the signature Stripe paintings and concentrating instead on works that revealed the continuing importance of shape, interval, and scale to Noland's efforts, the show encouraged reconsideration of his development from the late fifties to the present. The painter, acclaimed primarily as a colorist, has often spoken of his preoccupation with things other than color; he values highly, for example, works that have what he calls multiple "scales," whose interior structure can be read in more than one way, depending on the viewer's relationship to the work. I suspect that for most of his admirers, Noland's ravishing orchestrations of color have simply eclipsed the importance of other concerns to the success of his pictures – of extension, shape, and expanse, among other things. This is not to discount the role of chroma in Noland's pictures, but rather to stress the interdependence of color and other considerations.

The show made its point by juxtaposing a pair of rather atypical Circles from the early years of his career with a group of subtly colored, irregularly shaped canvases from the 1970s – tall, narrow surfboards and wide, spreading paintings with radiating "fans" of color – and a small selection of recent constructed pictures. It became clear that the recent works, built of disparate shaped elements assembled almost like bas reliefs, evolved logically from the earlier works, with each painted element, at first differentiated chiefly by hue and expanse, then by variations in texture, now assuming an almost independent material presence. Noland remains a subtle, unpredictable colorist, but in his newest works, each zone of color exists as a separate physical entity, while its real, literal form is, in turn, altered by shifts of sprayed tone and

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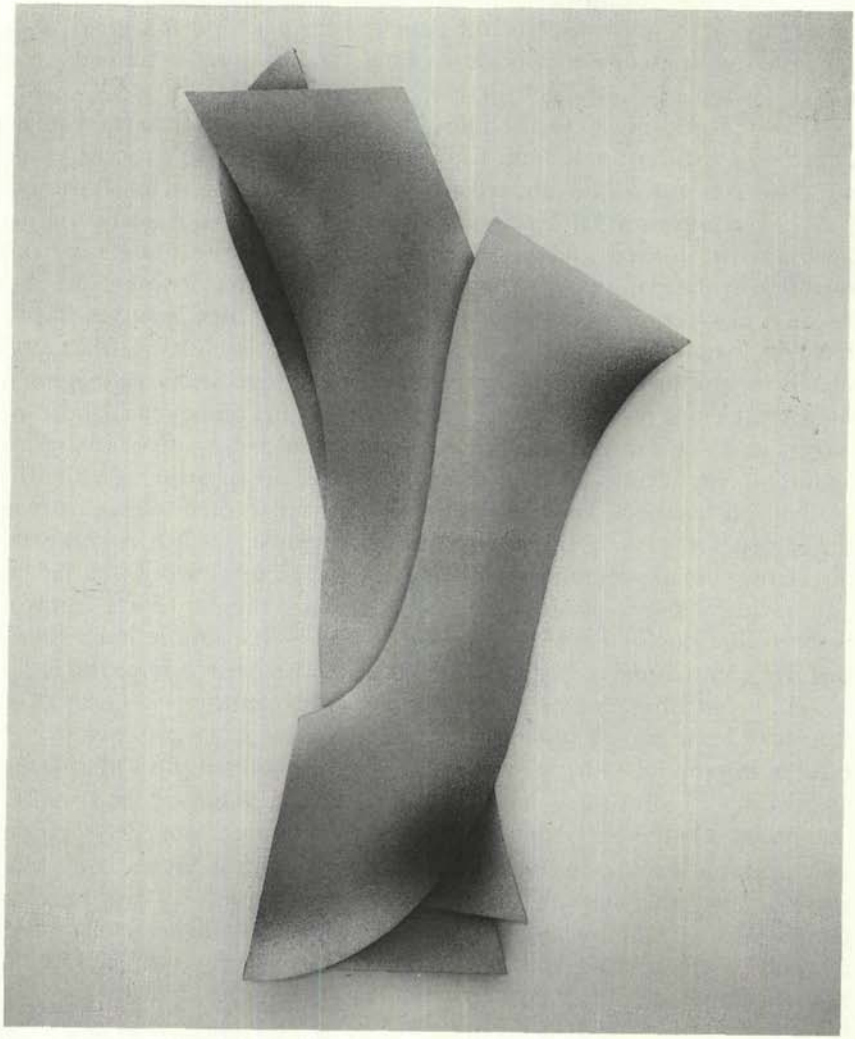

Flows: Robbers Gold (1994) by Kenneth Noland. Acrylic on canvas mounted on hollow core doors. 85 by 45 inches. Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery.

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color. The newest pictures read as explorations of an unstable territory where the two- and three-dimensional compete for dominance. There's obviously a lot more to Noland than the Stripes, and it's good to be presented with evidence of both the range and the single-mindedness of this cool modern-day Neoclassicist.

Color was primary to the impact of Jill Nathanson's pictures in her debut solo exhibition at June Kelly Gallery. Nathanson's recent works are slow, reticent, a little austere at first acquaintance. She has apparently reduced compositional strategies to the essential: a slightly warped quadrapartite format that becomes more complex the more time you spend with the paintings. Each quadrant not only has its own hue, but its own proportions, density, surface, touch, and edge qualities. Color hits first – strange, unnamable, but intensely evocative hues, further modulated by the proximity of the others. The simple structure begins to suggest all kinds of fundamental oppositions and relationships: landscape, water, and sky are the least of it. When you are confronted by her brooding, mysterious quasi-grids, it comes as no surprise to learn that Nathanson has been fascinated by cabalistic color theory – apart from the surprise of learning that such a discipline exists. But Nathanson is not illustrating arcane principles of Judaica. (Her pictures would be far less compelling if she were.) Instead, she is probing the expressive limits of basic painting issues – a high ambition indeed. What's more impressive is that she seems equal to the task. She's a painter to watch with interest.

As I said, there was a lot of good, serious painting to be seen last season and one superb installation that I am afraid I am going to have to call "multi–media." No, it was *not* the Bruce Nauman show, but rather Mary Lucier's absorbing, melancholy *Last Rites (Positano),* at Lennon-Weinberg Gallery, a complex "collage" of video images, recorded voices, water sounds, and furniture. *Last Rites (Positano)* is the most intimate of Lucier's pieces that I've seen to date, a probing into her own family history, employing images and interviews with her late mother, her half-sister, and an uncle. The story is relatively simple: Lucier's mother, during her brief early marriage to a glamorous, feckless German, lived with him in the Italian fishing village of Positano, in the early years of rising European fascism. The couple had a child – Lucier's half-sister – the marriage foundered, and Lucier's mother returned to Ohio, remarried, and raised both the child born in Italy and a second daughter, Lucier herself. The themes of the piece – the flux of time, the fluidity of memory, the persistence of the past, the presence of the other, and more – asserted themselves through rich layers of sound and images. Video monitors, their action and spoken narratives brought to life by the

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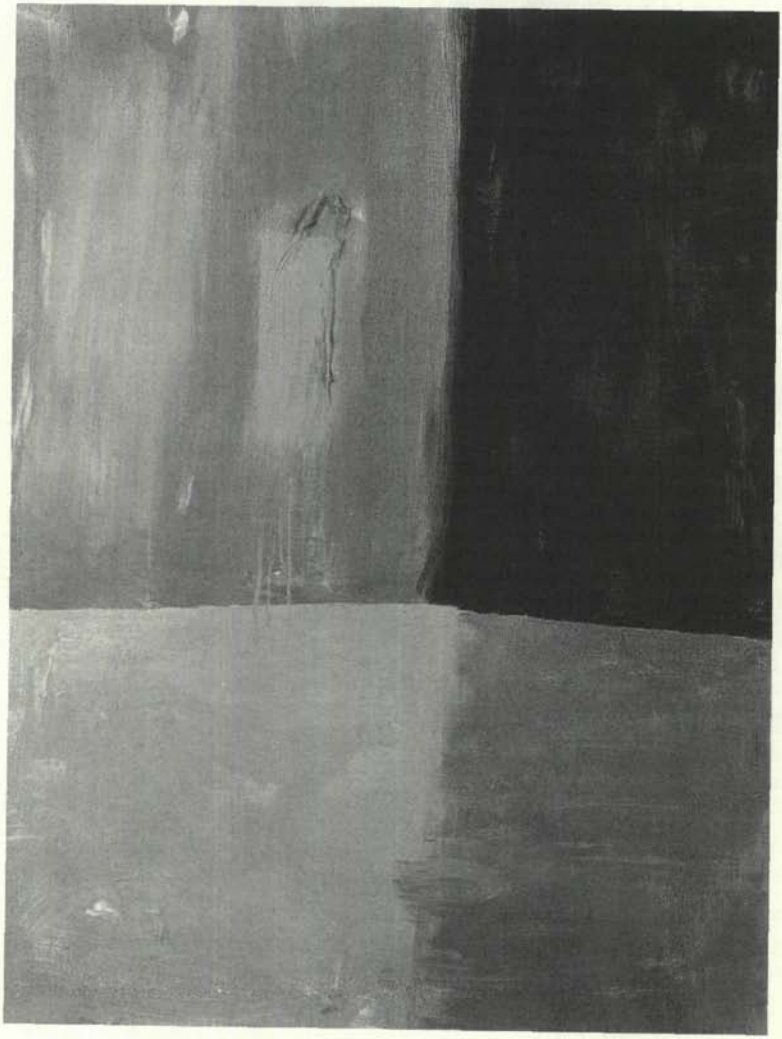

Tekiah (1994) by Jill Nathanson. Acrylic on canvas. 48 by 36 inches. Photo by John Berens. Courtesy of June Kelly Gallery.

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proximity of the viewer, allowed you slowly to piece together the story, through the recollections of participants – Lucier's mother and her brother and, miraculously, an aged Italian woman, located by chance in Positano, who had not only known the young couple, but had worked for them and remembered the christening of their child – and the rather embittered comments of that child, now a middle-aged woman, wholly American, but with what in some circles might be called an exotic origin-myth.

The density of the piece, the number of soundtracks and "active" images, depended on the number of visitors. I'd be hard put to say whether isolation or the crowd made the work more effective, since isolation revealed sounds hidden by the full orchestration, but full orchestration created a visual counterpoint among the images on the monitors. These were close-up heads, filmed at a slow speed, not enough to suggest slow-motion, but sufficient to make subtle changes of expression and small movements dramatic and monumental, or make the swing of an earring into an eloquent gesture. *Last Rites (Positano)* demanded close attention and multiple visits and amply rewarded them; you kept discovering things you'd missed the first time around: memories, observations, and associations. And through it all, against the back wall of the darkened gallery, two overlapping projected images of rippling water, timing slightly shifted, provided a graphic metaphor for instability and the passage of time. Lucier's one of the few video artists, in my experience, to use her medium for its inherently visual properties, not simply as a way of recording a narrative. From what I've seen of her work over the last decade or so, it keeps on getting subtler, more suggestive, and better.

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FICTION

AHARON APPELFELD

A Visit to His Married Daughter

On December twentieth Rabbi Hoch sat in his office and prepared the annual accounts. He kept two files for that purpose, an expense file, an income file, and a balance sheet. Always a difficult time, this year it was especially onerous, because debts had accrued. The creditors came every evening and harassed him. Now the cold numbers rose and slapped him in the face.

He stood up and walked to the window, a movement he made several times a day, in fact, whenever some perplexity or anger pressed him. From the window he could see the main street, the stores, and the merchants standing in their doorways. The merchants had always been his enemies. He hated them, and he repressed his hatred every day. Now he would be forced to meet them again. They would examine his accounts, ask hard questions, and finally make injurious remarks. At one time he used to argue with them and fight back, but in recent years negotiations with those sly foxes had become difficult for him. Their narrowed eyes expressed everything that was embodied in them: cunning and greed. After the meetings he felt weak. He would sip a few glasses of cognac and fall asleep in the armchair.

"Hirzl," he called.

"Yes, Rabbi?"

"Please come here."

"Right away, sir."

"Tomorrow is the board meeting."

"I remember, Rabbi."

Hirzl was sixty-three years old, and the housework was a strain for her now. Often during the past year she had wanted to leave her job, but every time she was about to step forward and tell the Rabbi, her mouth had been blocked. She loved the house, the furnishings, and the soft movement that rustled there, and she especially enjoyed serving the

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Rabbi. The Rabbi always treated her with respect, and sometimes he raised her salary.

Hirzl also hated the merchants. Often, when they raised their voices, she would reproach them, "You mustn't raise your voice in the Rabbi's office." She was an unfortunate woman, burdened with sorrows and not healthy, but she did not conceal her opinions from anyone. If she saw injustices or coarseness, she reproached people. At one time, when the merchants were pressuring the Rabbi, she had risen and said, "Even in the village people didn't plague the priest the way you plague the Rabbi." The merchants, apparently not expecting such a scolding, smiled and fell silent. She usually made her comments in the dark corridor that led outside and not in the Rabbi's presence. But, if there was no choice, she plucked up her courage and voiced the reproach. At one time the merchants wanted to have her discharged, but the Rabbi outwitted them. He divulged their plot to one of the city counselors, a distant relative of Hirzl's, and he intervened to prevent the wrong from being done. The merchants, of course, never forgot that, and from then on they were more cautious.

"They'll make arguments, I know, " said the Rabbi. "They always find fault with my annual accounting. This time I'll reprove them. I won't keep silent." Hirzl listened to his muttering and said, "I'll bring you a cup of coffee."

"Thank you."

Hirzl normally didn't serve coffee to the Rabbi at this hour, but when his mood was gloomy, and he was tense, she would bring him a cup of coffee and some cheesecake. If the Rabbi asked about something, she would tell him. She tried not to speak at length and to be precise. During the past years the rumors had brought no joy to the heart. The merchants grew richer and sent their sons and daughters to distant cities. Before that they had them baptized in church so their path in life would be prosperous. The Rabbi's memory was phenomenal, and he recalled every merchant by name. All these years he had labored in vain to bring them to the synagogue. Only on Yom Kippur would they put on their striped suits and, with their wives, as though under some compulsion, they gathered. Not all of them, of course. Were it not for the Christian neighbors, they wouldn't even come on the Holy Day. The neighbors were the only ones who reminded them that the Holy Day was approaching, and they had to close their shops, as their ancestors had done before.

Many years earlier, in a dreadful fit of anger, the Rabbi had proposed closing the synagogue, for a synagogue without a prayer quorum was a disgrace, but they wouldn't agree to it. A synagogue is a syna-

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gogue, they said, and it must be maintained. Then a strange compromise was found: to enlist the old men for morning prayers. Two carriages brought them from the old age home, and after prayers Hirzl served them breakfast.

"They're going to find fault with my report again," he remembered.

"You must ignore their arguments. It's a *bilbul* and nothing more," Hirzl hurriedly put out the fire.

The Rabbi smiled. He had often heard her use the Jewish expression *bilbul,* but this time it was spoken in a tone of contempt that made him laugh.

The next day he was also apprehensive. Hirzl served him vegetable soup and cheese pie, but not even the dishes he was fond of could calm him. The sight of the sleek merchants sitting in his office and drawing circles and question marks on the balance sheet, refusing to believe him and forcing him to rise from his chair and produce the receipts for them – the feeling of insult he remembered from the past year – once again seared him. He strove to forget, but the effort merely heightened his sense of insult. Finally he went outdoors and fled to the river, and for two solid hours he sat next to the water.

In the evening six board members came together. Hirzl opened the door, and they came straight into the office. The Rabbi showed them right away that there were many debts, and the treasury was empty. If the congregation did not make an effort, it would be a disgrace before the neighbors. He gave each of them a copy of the balance sheet and waited for their reactions, which were not long in coming. One of the merchants immediately suggested firing the synagogue janitor and the two practical nurses in the old age home. The views of the merchant Kaufmann were even more extreme. He reiterated his long-standing proposal, to close the synagogue and to open it only on the High Holy Days. Of course he ignored the well-known compromise which had been reached with great labor: the prayer quorum from the old age home.

"The prayer quorum must also be discontinued," suggested the merchant who had earlier suggested firing the janitor and the two practical nurses. "Why force old men to get up early? To whom does it do any good? Why torment them? They would be better off resting."

The Rabbi knew those arguments by heart. They were raised again every year. But now, for some reason, they paralyzed him. He sat and looked at the merchants as though they were not his familiar tormentors but new people who had just arrived. The words he had prepared in his mind during the past days gradually evaporated, and as in a dream he felt weak and stifled. "What does the Rabbi have to say?" All eyes were

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turned to him. The Rabbi wanted to inundate them with words and verses, but his mouth was blocked. The merchants sensed, apparently, that they had gone too far with their claims this time. They lowered their voices and said, "We are prepared to listen."

The Rabbi raised his head and looked at them again. They had been tormenting him for years. Were it not for his resolute threat to go to the mayor and tell him that the Jews refused to maintain the synagogue and care for the old people, were it not for that whip that he brandished over their heads every year and sometimes even at the regular board meetings, the synagogue would not be standing.

"Anyone who abandons old parents is like a murderer," he finally spoke up, as though not his own voice but an old pain broke through the thickness of his body.

"We," the merchant Kaufmann raised his right hand, "we give what we are capable of giving. You pressure us too much."

"Just for charity, just benevolence, nothing more," said the Rabbi, and his hand collapsed onto the table. More than once he had been about to declare, I resign. Find a Rabbi in your own image. The years had passed, and he had done nothing, and now came the torments and scrutiny again.

In the end he rose to his feet and called out "Shame on you! You are rich men. Your stores are bursting with merchandise. In the summer you travel to resort towns, and in the winter you go on ski holidays. God gave you possessions and money, and you, instead of thanking Him for his bounty, you bring contempt down upon His dwelling and His servants. God will not pardon you for that ungratefulness. He sees everything, and He knows everything, and nothing is hidden from Him."

Hearing that outburst, the merchants rose to their feet and said, "You're out of order. The synagogue budget is on the agenda today, not religious duties."

"You're sucking my blood."

"We're prepared to listen to relevant remarks, but not sermons."

The Rabbi knew he had erred this time. The first words had led him astray. This was not the way one negotiated with cagey merchants. It irked him that they had once more outwitted him. Again they had laid bare his weakness. Again they had maneuvered him into a corner. Even Hirzl, who had never attended school, even she chose her words better than he did. This time it was hard for him to subdue his anger, and he went outdoors and fled to the river.

Thus the struggle had proceeded for years. When the Rabbi reached the age of fifty, he was given the collected works of Goethe in leather binding as a present. The Rabbi refused to accept it. "If you wish to

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honor me, honor the old and sick people," he said then. "We'll honor both them and you," they sought to mollify him. He yielded to them and never forgave himself for yielding. Since then six years had passed. From year to year the struggle grew harsher, more burdensome and exhausting. Were it not for Hirzl, who cared for him and served him his meals on time, it's doubtful whether he would have kept going. When his mood was somber, she would tell him about her village, the church, and the priest. The village priest was not lenient to the sinners. He chided them severely, and if his reproaches were of no avail, he used to lash them with a whip, quite literally.

"Is that how people behave in the country?" wondered the Rabbi.

"In that way and none other. Some people are coarse in body and spirit, and only the whip works for them."

"And they're willing to be punished?"

"Yes. If the priest sees fit to punish them, that means they deserve it. Isn't that so?"

The following day he didn't get out of bed. Board meetings always made him ill. Hirzl didn't wake him up for prayers. At nearly eleven o'clock she served him a cup of coffee and a roll spread with butter.

"How was the service?" he asked before sipping his coffee.

"Everything went fine. Everybody came. I served them breakfast."

"Did the carriage-drivers behave properly?"

"Properly."

The morning prayer quorum had been held for ten years now. At one time a few merchants had also joined the old men. Now only the Rabbi and the old men prayed. It wasn't easy for them to get up in the morning, to dress and go out in the carriages. The distance from the old age home to the synagogue was not great, but still, it was a distance. Were it not for the hot meal that Hirzl prepared for them, no one could have roused them from their beds. The meal and the cigarette after it renewed them, and they returned to the old age home with glowing faces.

Only in the afternoon did the Rabbi overcome his weakness and get out of bed. He immediately headed for the meadows, and from there to the river. It is not easy to rid one's mind of six surfeited faces demanding again and again that reductions must be made, efficiency must be increased, and morning prayers and the afternoon Talmud lesson must be canceled. "An ancient creed must die an honorable death, but not with exaggerated stridency," they declared in a clever-sounding, annoying tone. The Rabbi was revoltingly familiar with those tones, but still, when they were heard in his office, an evil chill made his whole body

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shrink.

Only the soft evening breezes, only the lights of the sunset slightly soothed the insult. Sometimes not even the comforts of the evening were effective, and he was forced to turn to his mute savior, the bottle of cognac, which did what no medicine could.

In the evening Hirzl made him a full meal, as though after a fast. Over the years, she learned to speak with restraint. If she was asked, she answered. Gossip was strictly forbidden.

"The sky has cleared. It was a lovely evening," said the Rabbi.

"If only we have no troubles."

"I should have acted differently. They interpret softness as weakness. I must tell them exactly what I think. Next time I'll tell them exactly what I think. I won't allow them to leave until I tell them everything." That muttering was apparently necessary to him, for he repeated it after every board meeting.

Sometimes Hirzl permitted herself to tell the Rabbi some of her troubles. Her elder daughter had gone blind, and her husband abandoned her. Her younger daughter was healthy, but her life was not worth living. Her husband beat her cruelly. Hirzl hadn't heard from her sons in years. They hadn't written or visited her. The Rabbi would ask for some details, and he would immediately tell her that on the next payday he'd give her extra money for the fare so she could visit her daughters.

This time she told him at length, which was unusual for her, about her younger daughter, who had fled from her husband and now was living in her home. She was afraid to leave the house, and spent the whole day curled up in bed. Hirzl shouted at her and tried to pull her out of bed, but her shouts were useless. Fear, apparently, had taken over her.

"What should I do, Rabbi?" asked Hirzl in an anguished voice.

"I would leave her alone," said the Rabbi.

"She's already been in bed for two weeks. She's liable to get sick."

"How many years did she suffer from her husband?"

"For many years, Rabbi."

"One can't uproot fear from one's heart in a single day."

"I don't know what to do, Rabbi."

"Leave her alone. She needs rest like air to breathe." Upon hearing the Rabbi's last words, Hirzl's face lit up, as though he had promised her a cure for her hidden wound.

The next day a heavy rain fell, and the Rabbi stood in the synagogue doorway awaiting the old men. The carriages arrived late, but the Rabbi made no comment, wished the old men a good morning, and entered

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the sanctuary. They complained about the carriages and the dampness, removed their galoshes, and sat in the first two rows.

"Who'll lead the prayers today?" asked the Rabbi.

No one responded.

"I'll do it, with your permission."

The prayer was quiet and fluent. Some of them prayed with closed eyes, and some buried their faces in the prayer books. The Rabbi loved their prayer. Old age softens the loss of faith. A person forgets his doubts for a moment and prays as his ancestors had prayed.

After prayers, Hirzl served coffee and cheese turnovers. Seeing the steaming coffee, the old men's eyes lit up, and something of their hidden being rose to their faces. The Rabbi knew them well. It isn't easy to spend your last few days far from your house and your bed, in an old age home on the outskirts of the city. At one time he used to preach to them and say, "Look, I send carriages to bring you here. Isn't it good to start the day with prayer?" Remarks like that made them angrier than anything. "We don't want to pray," they grumbled.

"Why?"

"Because we don't want to pray at a set time."

It had been a struggle, and the Rabbi won, neither a full victory nor a pleasant one. The old men acceded to his demand, not because they yearned for prayer, but rather for Hirzl's tasty breakfasts, the good cigarette, and the pocket money. In his heart he hoped that one day they would pray willingly, but that willingness was slow in coming.

Breakfast lasted for around an hour. During that hour the old men exchanged remarks about the previous night, their alienated sons, the wicked bureaucracy, and about one old man who couldn't stand the solitude and had fled from the old age home. If the carriage-drivers had not come to fetch them, they would have kept sitting there, but the carriage-drivers' time was dear. They prodded them to finish the meal. "You mustn't rush people while they're eating," the Rabbi used to reproach them. This time too he reproached them, but aside from that little unpleasantness, nothing else happened that morning. The carriages returned whence they had come.

When he came back to his office, he found a telegram on his desk. He opened it cautiously. The large letters immediately pounded him in the face. Donia, his beloved daughter, whom he hadn't seen in eleven years, she and none other had sent to him,"On Thursday our son Heinrich will be ten years old. We would be pleased to see you in our home." He read it again and again, and the more he read it, the more his eyes were dazzled. He cautiously leaned on his arms and sat in the chair. In high school Donia had fallen in love with a Christian boy, a

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sturdy lad, full of life. For two years she had concealed their love, but after finishing her studies, she came home and said, "Father, I am leaving the house."

"Why?"

"I'm going to get married."

In vain he tried to part them. For hours he sat and talked to her. What didn't he say to her during those hours? Once, in great despair, he had said, "The Jews are few, but they are noble, the sons of kings, who have been entrusted with a noble mission."

"Noble?" Donia had wondered, as though casting doubt not only on his beliefs but also on his paternity.

All of his arguments fell on deaf ears. She was in love and resolved to convert and be married in the church. Her mother, Johanna, accepted the news with a silly smile, as though her daughter had succeeded in doing something she had not managed to do. The expression on her face drove him mad, and he shouted, "You're no better than she is." He shut himself up in his office.

When he came out of his office he was no longer the familiar Rabbi Kurt Hoch, but rather a withdrawn and closed man. After that they quarreled about everything. Once Johanna had burst out and shouted at him, "You've repressed me all these years. In whose name, in the name of what did you do it to me? In the name of an old-fashioned faith, in the name of moldy laws, in the name of your sick selfishness. People want freedom and not prohibitions. People want to read, not to interpret. I hate interpretations. Interpretations are boring."

From then on, whenever he said anything, she would shout, "Those interpretations are stupidity. It's no wonder the young people flee to the church. The church is more beautiful, more enlightened."

Thus mother and daughter formed an alliance. After the daughter's marriage began prolonged divorce proceedings that lasted about a year and took place far away from Mansdorf in a small city named Hohnheim, before an old rabbi who demanded concessions and compromises from him. Johanna stood like a fortress and conceded to nothing. Not only that, she called him selfish and stingy. Kurt did not hold back either. But his arguments were weaker, and the way he phrased them was awkward. Here, too, she won. He was forced to give her most of his savings.

His shame was great, and the wound bled. He spent most of the day with the elderly men in the old people's home or in his office, shunning the streets, the cafés, and the theater. He made his way from his house to the old people's home through strands of trees and vacant lots, so as not to be seen. Daylight became his greatest enemy. Without Hirzl, without

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her devotion, the meals she served him, he could not have held his own.

"I received a telegram from Donia," he announced to Hirzl at lunch. Hearing the news her face tensed, and she looked attentive. "She invited me to visit her." Now he was as though waiting for Hirzl to say something. Hirzl never expressed an opinion unless asked. She served him a bowl of soup and retreated to the kitchen entrance, standing next to the china cabinet.

Later he turned to her and asked, "What do you say?"

"Whatever God places in your heart."

"I must overcome pride. Pride is a despicable trait," he said. Hirzl understood from his tone of voice, that he had made up his mind, and she immediately went to pack his suitcase.

He left in the afternoon. He knew there was no train at that hour. Nevertheless he couldn't stop his feet. He loved the path to the railway station. There were bare hills that extended along the railroad, and among them a few small winter ponds and remains of woods. What charmed him especially in these abandoned places were the wild birds that nested there and flew low, making the air tremble close to the ground. Strangely, only in that silent neglect did he occasionally feel that despair had not destroyed faith within him. He sat and deluded himself that not everything was lost, and that if he continued to resist, even the heard-hearted merchants would realize that the Jewish faith was a great faith, and they would return to their Father in heaven.

When he reached the station, the evening twilight had come. The cashier told him that the train to Mannhausen had already left, and only early in the morning, at four-thirty, would the next train be leaving. At that time a few workers were sitting in the buffet, and two young women were chattering out loud. It was seven, and Kurt decided it would be better to stay there and not to return home. He immediately ordered a drink. The first pungent sip unwittingly brought back before his eyes his father's bitter and skeptical look, his long arms, his lower lip, to which a cigarette always clung. Until his last day he never forgave his son for becoming a rabbi. Once he said to him, "One day you'll be sorry for all that foolishness." He was a sharp-witted man, outraged by all religious belief. He kept his distance from Jews and their creed. Unfortunately for him, he was surrounded by Jews all his life, mainly keepers of the Sabbath, whom he continually provoked until his retirement. Nor did he relent in old age. He said, "Jews are everywhere. Why do they talk so loudly?" When he heard that Kurt had registered at the theological seminary he grasped his head in both hands and said, "It's beyond my understanding, beyond it." His large eyes opened with a kind of

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frightening astonishment, as though he had been told that the laws of Copernicus no longer applied and chaos reigned in the world. After regaining his composure he said, "What brought you to do it?" If I knew what brought you to it, I'd forgive you for everything. I want to understand."

"Faith in God."

"Do you believe in special providence?"

"Indeed."

"So you believe that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai."

"Indeed."

"So we must keep the six hundred and thirteen commandments."

"Correct."

"Where does that madness of yours come from? Who infected you with that folly?"

"It's a feeling, Father. It's hard for me to explain it."

"A feeling, you say. Where's logic? Common sense? Science? The new discoveries? Feelings only deceive you, they only confuse you."

From then on they never conversed again, nor did they argue. When he returned home from the seminary on vacations, his father's face would close. He asked no questions and took no interest, as though Kurt were not his son but a ghostly shade. His mother tried at first to reconcile them, but seeing the abyss yawning between them, she ceased.

Later, too, when he had retired from business and grown old, lying in his sickbed, they didn't exchange words. Sometimes he would fix him with his gaze as though seeing the traces of his son who had left the world before his time and left that golem in his place. His father willed his body to science, and of course there was no funeral. His mother remained faithful to her husband and donated her body to the medical school of her native city. The pain was strong, but Kurt didn't allow himself to show emotions. He was certain that he was a soldier at the front. He must surpress his feelings, dwell in the provinces, teach merchants Bible and Gemara, and return them to their Father in heaven.

It had been a long time since he had seen his dead parents with such clarity. Once they were revealed to him, the old pain returned to sear him. He sipped two drinks and immediately felt better.

From that station, not many years ago, he used to set out for the villages to celebrate weddings or officiate at funerals. Now no more weddings were held in villages. Sometimes he was summoned to a village for a funeral. "The Jews are dying, and other Jews are not being born in their places." A year earlier an elderly village Jew had said that. His wife had passed away, and he was standing in his courtyard as though the soul had been plucked from his body. Kurt remembered his face, his stature,

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and his extended arms. He had wanted to recite a verse to him to console him, but no verse came to his lips, and instead a stale joke rose to his mind, so stale was it that for a few days he sensed its spoiled taste in his mouth.

Meanwhile the buffet emptied. Only the two young women remained there, raucous music played, and the owner of the buffet, a coarse-looking man, announced that in another twenty minutes he was locking the buffet. "Honey," one of the women, who had drunk one too many, turned to him, "Why don't you go back home to your sweet wife. You're as drunk as a coot."

Kurt rose to his feet. The impudent voice baffled him for a moment, and he answered quietly, "Honey, I'm not drunk."

"You are drunk, sweetie. Your legs are trembling."

"I?"

She chortled as though a man's hand had stroked her, and she said, "I like you."

"I'm no longer such a young man, dear."

"You're a fine man. Susi and I would be happy to entertain you in our house. Your sweet wife can wait awhile."

"I'm turning out the lights," the buffet owner called out from his window. "It's after midnight. I've been patient enough tonight."

Kurt stepped over to the counter and paid. That slight motion made him dizzy. It was important to him, for some reason, to show those young women that he was standing firmly on his feet.

At the buffet window he called out, "Go home, young ladies. The hour is late."

"He's talking to us like a priest."

"I'm a rabbi."

"You don't look like it. Rabbis have beards. You're drunk, honey. You're mixed up. Why don't you give us a tenner? We didn't make a penny tonight."

Kurt reached his hand to his vest pocket, took out a banknote and gave it to her.

"You're as sweet as honey," she said and kissed him on the lips. He stood still, and they went away, chattering out loud, rolling out vulgar words, and laughing at the top of their voices. For a long while he stood in the damp darkness and the longer he stood, the more he felt the thoughts draining out of his head. Now he no longer remembered what had brought him there. His feet stumbled, and his body trembled. He grasped the railing of the stairs and sat down. That movement pressed his stomach a little, and he vomited.

After vomiting, he felt relieved. A pleasant odor of moist fallen

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leaves permeated the air. The darkness was thick, but windless. He remembered the two women he had chatted with. Suddenly it seemed to him that they were standing at the end of the platform and looking at him.

"Why don't you come here? There's nothing to be afraid of," he called out. It was an illusion, apparently. He fell to his knees, curled up on the ground, and closed his eyes.

The ticket windows opened noisily and awakened him. Kurt rose, and as in a dream he approached the ticket window. "To Mannhausen, miss," he said, glad he had remembered the name of that remote place. The train came on time, and it was quiet, not crowded. It immediately sped out across the wintry fields. All the cognac he had drunk gradually dissipated from his body. He sat in the dining car and drank the cup of coffee that was served him.

Three Jewish merchants sat in a corner and argued about some complex transaction. They argued with vehemence and picked on each other. Kurt felt a kind of revulsion from them, perhaps because they were speaking faulty German. Their grimaces reminded him of his merchants, who only two days earlier had threatened to close the synagogue. He shut his eyes and fell asleep.

When he awoke, the merchants were still sitting in the corner and provoking each other, but by now the fire had gone out; they were reminiscing about bygone days and mulling them over. Kurt ordered a cup of coffee. The strong coffee cleared his mind, and he knew that he had spent last night in the station and that he was now on his way to Donia's. For a long while he sat without moving. The fields passed by him, green and gray. Here and there was an animal or a hut, as though to remind him that man had a place in that vast green sea as well.

He reached Mannhausen at noon. The old, rural station had two stories, reminding him of other stations where he had lingered on his way to or from a village. He knew in such a station he would find a hot meal on the second floor, cheese turnovers and a cup of coffee.

"I'll rest for a while" he said to himself and went upstairs.

It was a roomy café whose large windows faced the open landscape. The furniture was simple and warm. The landlady, a young woman, immediately told him what there was to eat. Kurt thanked the woman for offering him her dishes as though she had kept him from making a dreadful error. Now he wanted to ask her where the Lumpel family lived, but the question that was well formulated in his head suddenly seemed inappropriate to him. The woman apparently sensed his hidden intention and hurried over to tell him. She said, "This is a small place, and we are few. Just three families. We live near the station and make a

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living from occasional jobs. Freight trains load and unload grain and building materials for the villagers in the area. We serve them. The winter worries me more than anything," she finished, not speaking to the point.

"Why?" Kurt bent his head.

"The isolation, sir. It's harder to bear than the damp."

"Don't you meet on Sundays?"

"We meet, but it's hard to talk."

"I understand," said Kurt, for some reason.

"A person has to live here in order to understand," she said and pursed her lips.

Now he saw Donia as he hadn't seen her for a long time. In high school she had been a brilliant girl. She had done excellently in mathematics and Latin, and the teachers predicted a future in science for her. "But life was stronger than she and swept her up," Kurt uttered that impenetrable sentence to himself, rose to his feet, and stepped over to the window. The sight was splendid: bare treetops rising to the height of the window, but when he lowered his gaze, he was nearly struck with blindness: two girls and next to them a boy of about ten were rolling on the grass and shouting. Donia stood in the doorway, with a belt in her hand, threatening to punish them. At her side stood her mother, Johanna. It was now hard to distinguish between mother and daughter. They looked like sisters. Suddenly a man emerged from the toolshed and said, "I'm going out."

"Where?" asked Donia without turning toward him.

"To the village, to have a drink."

"Don't drink too much, do you hear?"

After her husband left, Donia went down to the courtyard, and without mercy she whipped the children. The children screamed, howled, and tried to escape her, but to no avail. She pounded them with the belt and with her fists. All the time Johanna stood in the doorway and watched what her daughter was doing. The same silly smile was spread across her face.

When the storm of anger died down, the children lay on the ground weeping and screeching, their legs quivering. "They're strangling me," said Donia and threw down the belt.

Kurt lit a cigarette and opened his bag. In the bag lay a prayer book, a prayer shawl, phylacteries, and two sandwiches that Hirzl had wrapped in white paper. He swiftly closed the bag, as though he had encountered a familiar object that could no longer serve him.

For a short while he stood and watched the unseemly commotion. Then he picked up his bag and headed toward the counter with a silent

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movement. The woman gave him the bill, and he paid. At the ticket counter he learned that the train was due in ten minutes. That information surprised him, and he rubbed his hands together.

The train indeed came on time and, without noticing, took in the few people who were waiting for it. This time too it was half empty and quiet. He immediately sat in the dining car and ordered a drink. The slightly open window and the full glass thawed his clenched fists, and he quickly ordered a second one, drank it down, and placed his head in his hands. For a moment it seemed to him that he was still standing up there, looking at that distortion of himself, and, as in a nightmare, he wanted to reach out and rescue the children from their mother's bony hands. That, of course, was a passing spasm. His body gradually was blanketed in the rocking of the train. What had happened to him during the past day was suddenly erased from his mind, and he was left with only one blind desire: to return home, to eat the hot vegetable soup that Hirzl had prepared for him, to remove his shoes, and to lay his head on the pillow.

Translated from the Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green

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POEMS

JAN KOCHANOWSKI

Lament 16

No end to misery; my own
Has chilled me to the marrowbone;
I must forgo my rhyme and lute:
My soul is mute.

Am I alive? asleep? It seems
My head's a haunted house for dreams
That first delude my inner eye,
Then fade and die.

O error of our minds! Insane
Conceit of men! We feel no pain,
Then straight presume our reason proof
Against all grief.

In plenty we praise poverty;
In pleasure, sorrow seems to be
Easy to bear; each living breath
Makes light of Death.

But when the Parcae cease to spin
Their thread, when sorrows enter in,
When Death knocks at the door, at last
We stand aghast.

Cicero, silver tongue, please tell
Why exile's tears afflict you still;
Did you not claim: "The world's my home,
And not just Rome?"

Translators' Note: The poems published here belong in the sequence of nineteen *Laments* (1580) that Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), the greatest Polish poet up to the beginning of the nineteenth century and the central figure in the so-called Golden Age of the Polish Renaissance, wrote in the wake of the death of his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Ursula.

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Why do you mourn your lovely girl?
Did you not say your dearest pearl
Was clear conscience? Doesn't your woe
Prove that untrue?

Only the godless – you have said –
Fear death; then what about your dread,
When threats were Antony's rewards
For your bold words?

Your logic, O angelic pen,
Compelling to the minds of men,
Rings hollow when your soul, like mine,
Cries out in pain.

Man is not stone; his wounds run deep;
His joys are like a scar on top;
And once it's touched, that buried ache
Throbs wide awake.

Time, father of forgetfulness,
Stronger than reason and no less
Potent than faith; heal, heal my heart
That's torn apart.

Lament 2

If my vocation had been children's rhymes
And my true art the one that mimes and calms
The rhythms of the cradle, then my verse
Might have made dandling songs for the wet nurse
To sing to her new charge until at last
Its tears would stop and its small woes be past!
Such jingles would have been of much more use
Than what misfortune forces me to choose:
To weep on a small daughter's grave, to keen
Her loss to Pluto's dark hard-hearted queen.
Admittedly, my choice was never free:

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The lullaby, to a grown man like me,
Seemed far too childish; now the epitaph
Looms like a cliff above some wild and rough
Shore, where I'm cast by fate and where I sing
Oblivious to my fame, to everything
Except my grief. And I, who never wrote
To court a living ear, have tuned my note
To appease the dead; in vain, alas! One rule
Applies to all, for man is Fortune's fool.
O cruel, unjust law! How can you be
So implacable, so hard, Persephone!
Why did you have to snatch away my small
Girl who had hardly learned to live at all,
Who never came to full bloom in the light
Before her eyes closed underneath your night?
I wish she had not seen the world – for what
True sense of it could she, a child, have got?
She saw her birth and death; and then she fled
And turned hearts full of love to hearts of lead.

Translated from the Polish
by Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney

ALFRED CORN

Water Like a Philosopher's Stone

Now, out of skies like lead, as the hoary old
cliché describes them, comes a massive snowfall,
no doubt the one barometers deep in the bone
and wide-eyed weathercasters were predicting.

An unplanned celebration for us all:
errands done, there's time, before we scuttle
home, for a twilight walk, as fine-grained drifts
of industrial diamond renovate a city.

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Transmutation of the commonplace,
is it, straightforwardness as magic, making
those thrown-out, ugly-duckling shopping bags
turn sculptural, like snow-white swans at gaze?

Or cannily revealing zinc-gray chainlink
playground fences as the crochet network
they are; that streetlamp, a North Sea lighthouse,
which now comes on and paves the street with gold –
with light. It's still *our* street, and, as such, home.

TOM SLEIGH

Great Island

"Animula blandula vagula . . . "

Out beyond the shadows of the headlands
        it was all ocean I couldn't see beyond,
the harsh, head-clearing smell
        of washed-up kelp and iodine . . .

Sea graveyard shifting, rolling;
        the wind I leaned against testing
and reproving while sun
        like a searchlight swept across the sand

and the clouds hung over me
        like listening posts
attentive to the gravid
        words of the dead:

"Friend and guest, companion
        of my flesh, my own small soul
now drifting gently down
        and down to that lightless place

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scoured clean as marble, stark,
bare, there you will cease,
there you will abandon
like a child your old fond toys . . .

But wait just one moment –
clear eyes behind my eyes,
let's look together on these waves
immersed in shadow, emerging into sun

that in a moment
we'll never see again . . .
Pallid, naked, almost numb, my own
small soul, if we can, let us pass

into this darkness, this limbo
of echoes, this nesting ground
for all the world's
orphaned words,

with open eyes."

JOHN PECK

Raina

Lulled on the placid silk
of an upside-down heaven
ringed by Austrian peaks,
she let the boat drift
and the big paint-flaking oars
slip out through the notched oarlocks.
Her little cousin prattled.

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Cattle in the high reaches moaned.
Purpling stillness listened.
Bolting downslope, their bells
faint as those in chapel,
the herd rolled for the bridge.

She flailed with cupped hands, ordering
the little one to sing
and bail with a picnic spoon.
Farmers in market dorries
pumped on poles and wedged
into the hewn oak arches
of the unshakable span.

Cloud bellied and broke
into bright jags above
matronly hips and cellos
swaying the railing, prows
nosing under, the bolted
lacework of the trusses
soggily giving way.

She chanted to herself
then spoke it to the empty
landing, *I didn't steal*
the boat, I didn't steal it.
Creamy froth over chocolate
worked in the matchstick narrows
a hypnotized dispersal
of heads, humps, apples.

She yoked the tie-up
around a brass clew, watching
its crown swell in the sun
just then returning, bead
bulging on the lettuce
in a drenched colander.
Vast urgency gathered
in her throat, helpless

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responsibility,
and though that easing wash
of home light has come down
many times since, even
past the fence of the Camp
where they took her father
and then took them, too, all

those black tunics crammed in,
mouths repetitive
their foulness towards her boyish,
though even there it fell
on her skin with the same
laundry freshness, never
has it quite assured her
of the real things of earth.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Je n'ai pas oublié

I can't forget the place. It was just out of town,
A plaster goddess holding fruit, a Venus in dull stone
Hid their worn arms and legs behind a bit
Of ragged shrubbery. The house, small, white,
Made otherwise no claims. Yet it was quiet there.
Each afternoon the sun thrust in its brazen glare
Through the window, seeming to watch us with a curious eye
And drenching with his brilliant dye
The serge curtain and rough cloth, the stoneware bowl,
While we sat a long time, not speaking, at our meal.

Translated from the French by Millicent Bell

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STEPHEN SANDY

Mogadishu, Mon Amour

The wrathful boys must drag it, trussed with rope,
Jigging around their city, thirsty world;
A dusty shape, a body road stones strip.
I budge; wedge breath down; must clamor, must
Find it, the flawed word for that flaunting;
This losing face – body exhibited
And savaged. Sighing for the young dead, I want
Vengeance on vengeful boys whose rage is hurled
On him, on me, taunting with gun and vaunting
Arm. Then woe; the weighted body; lust
(Folded under the last social motion,
Find it sleeping like a dog in sun!) – I want
To be with him, naked body dead;
In secret want the innocent submission.

Air Power Suite

Arching thoughts deny all but perfection
it is true yet the parabola of her smile made us
wonder; her carnations would astonish their banquet.
The feeling was we got down with it, went down;
but someone said – in the privacy of our den,
stale it was, but secure – how she
was a bastard, the bastard. The boss took off
her helmet to hear us, but she didn't because
she couldn't stop talking, and we were safe.
So too were the mobile doves floating around
the conference room above the white table big
as a hockey rink and half as dangerous;

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floated hovered and came to rest then on the
decorative ceramics fouling them a little
but not so anyone would notice, really, because
of the attractive way the glazes flowed and pooled
over the edges, like thoughts rising toward
the apogee of their expression, arcs that slowed
as they attained their last extremities until
they seemed as still as the perfection they implied.

GEORGIA SHREVE

Time of Mourning

How long are we allowed to mourn?
A week for every year with our beloved,
A month for every child we bore together,
A day for every trauma shared?
Or will we be granted an extra helping of time,
A cushion to absorb the shock?
We mourn faster here than elsewhere,
Women get a larger share than men,
And everyone gets more
For mourning children.
But how can we pace our grief
To bring it to a stop just in time?
And squeeze the last drops in
When we feel our time run out?
If we fail to stop
We can be convicted of excess –
Of wallowing –
So we tuck the extra inside
And smuggle it
Through the rest of life.

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MARTÍN ESPADA

Public School 190, Brooklyn 1963

The inkwells had no ink.
The flag had 48 stars, four years
after Alaska and Hawaii.
There were vandalized blackboards
and chairs with three legs,
taped windows, retarded boys
penned in the basement.
Some of us stared in Spanish.
We windmilled punches
or hid in the closets to steal from coats
as the teacher drowsed, head bobbing.
We had the Dick and Jane books,
but someone filled in their faces
with a brown crayon.

When Kennedy was shot,
they hurried us onto buses,
not saying why,
saying only that
something bad had happened.
But we knew
something bad had happened,
knew that before
November 22, 1963.

RACHEL WETZSTEON

Surgical Moves

Lights dimmed, the scraper scraped, and I could feel
the change begin; it was the kind of pain
you brace yourself and bear, imagining
all the unfolding options that the cuts

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make possible. The red that rolled away
gave rise to thoughts of rolling hills, and so
I told myself, it is a pinch that pays.
Just in the nick of time, I'm hardly doomed
but free to choose my way and free to find
great pleasure in the choosing: jumping off
the table, throwing down the bloody smock
and bolting from the operating room,
I'm the poor fool who stumbles up the aisle
and I'm the sweet face at the other end
who blesses and forgives; I'm in a cloak
behind a pillar, spying on a thief
who answers to my name. Come find me on
the summer lawns, the moonlit winter rinks
and drag me back to where the spongy lumps
coagulate and darken; counsel me
to get down on my knees and look at what
I left behind; implore me to admit
that all the red is realer than the roads
I hastily, unthinkingly pursued;
however many stumps are floating in
the pulp like ghosts of shapes that might have been,
however many stares are telling me to
clean up the mess, it is no mess of mine.

STEPHEN KUUSISTO

Harvest

My Chinese doctor tells me to sit in the park, that green,
the very color, will forestall blindness, and so I sit
under the hemlocks planted by Baptists.
My temporal task is to hear music,
drink a cup of chrysanthemum tea,
admire the white moon of the morning,
even if my eyes tell me there are two moons.
It's almost a game: this superstition,
my slow idolatry of leaves,
the sparrows hopping as if on fire.

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My story is pure vertigo, my eyes
are poppy-petaled, open to the sun.
O cuerpo oscura, I feel my way along the street
and hear voices. Sometimes I ask
what's to regret?
Daylight fails without me.

DENISE DUHAMEL

August

That night the moon is every girl's pony,
an ecstatic face looking down at her the first time
she makes love. Some say the moon's a man,
or at least know of a man living there.
Others insist the moon's all-woman,
her skirt – the ocean waves, Marilyn Monroe
over a subway grate. I smell a fireplace
that night but can't find it, each chimney
cold and alone. I see the air
and taste the fog, a soufflé fresh out of the oven.
It's hot, summer in Mill Town. Joe and Jane
put their faces up to their electric fans
before they leave to work the graveyard shift.
In each row house, sheets are full of sweat.
Husbands disentangle from wives so both can breathe.
A third group still believes the moon is cheese,
that the astronauts were just lucky to land on the right spot.
The emergency room fills up, gun shots and stab wounds.
"That bitch is making people crazy," one doc says.
The moon has never been called that before.
His wife begins her period, staining her nightgown,
as she dreams of red horses coming over red hills

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to trample her. There goes her chance
to have another baby. She wills her blood
back up her legs, wills it to bond with cells
to make hair and bones, eyes
and a thinner, different kind of blood.
Not all girls really notice the moon,
not all girls really want ponies.
Not all the women in town want children.
The moon dances with her partner, the sun,
keeping an arm's-length apart.
That's where we come in, the earth
squeezing between like a neglected daughter,
making up all kinds of stories when we're ignored.

PHILIP APPLEMAN

Parable of the Cave

Outside
the holy winds are raging,
but here in the dusk of our lives,
shadows blur along the rocky wall –
as if, once upon a time,
it all might possibly have happened:
the games of forgotten children,
the arc of dying swallows, the sway
of goldenrod – shadows now
along the barren rock.
Here, among fleeting caresses,
voices are humming Believe, Believe,
and we wait for the revelation
when our cave flares up in glory:
the gorgeous blast of shrapnel,
the fever of flashing guns, sages
standing in God's freezing fire,
in certainty, certainty,
certainty.

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CYNTHIA NADELMAN

The Cathedral as Process

The way that prismed
dragonfly
in the clearing
among highbush blueberries
and granite boulders
in full view of the Atlantic
and its lighthouse
kept circling, methodically,
and swooping to catch smaller insect prey
had me spinning in a spot,
just as now, in a composition
imagining a lark loose in the church,
the spin is as taut a construction
as the one we attend.
Here, where a meditation
takes place, is something incomplete,
a mixing of stones and genres,
sculptures not finished that
must never look new
(pastiche a complained-of possibility).
The dragonfly, if it built a web,
would likewise keep turning, again and again,
unsure of the strength of its bond,
faithful to the task,
never fully nourished.
Of such uncertainties
we build every temple.

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PAULA RANKIN

Down the Road

I'm already there, says my birthday,
though evidently not far enough, say my family
and the doctors. But it's tiring
so I'm taking a break. Where are you, God,
when I need you? Sometimes the people I've needed
have been even needier than I.

One year, my friend and I sat with legs swinging
from the seawall at high tide, toes barely sluicing
the shapes of the waves. Thinking deeply,
my friend declared each of us had already passed
our death-day, that there was a calendar square
waiting, though perhaps already filled
with important appointments, perhaps even the winning
of the Lottery, perhaps even Love or a good fight
or a fine coiffure or *haute couture* on a day
of otherwise flu and laryngitis, writer's block,

each of which would give way
as if they had no lasting power,
as if there were, after all, little sense
in anyone's making plans.

The road is usually still, always the dirt or gravel path
with weedflowers – deadnettle, rue – pushing through.
Tonight my beloved '85 Cadillac is stuck
in a raggedy pothole. One radial tire is flat
but the wire-rim hubcap, coveted enough
by someone one night to have been pried loose with the others
for resale, or prized out of need or love, seems OK.
The road is passing through the rural quiet
with no store, street lamps, or neon, not even a moon.
I'm praying there's a bend past which lies a fork,
one side of which heads straight to town. I'm praying
that all it takes is for me to choose rightly,
I, whose strongest weakness lies in not knowing
how to choose. I've gotten out the map

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but cannot see to read it; my fingers race from here
to there, to where. To courage. To getting out of the car
and walking, running, building up breath and muscle.

If only the road hadn't been poured into hills, valleys,
twists, and turns. If only the above weren't a fragment,
like this, like our hope of God and salvation.
If only legs and breath lasted longer. At least the road
keeps going, as if it will outlive us,
as if just by moving we'll soon be somewhere else.
I bank on this as I place one shoe in front of the other.
They're on it. They're getting somewhere.
Let's be sure to meet there;
we've missed each other so.

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JOSEPH BRODSKY

Wooing the Inanimate (Four Poems by Thomas Hardy)

"Cold" in "Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres" underscores this transformation; but on the whole, the line is extremely interesting because it arguably contains a hidden metaphor of the very process of composing this poem. On the surface – or, rather, underneath it – we have the movement of the waves approaching the shore (or a bay, or a cove), which looks like the horn of a lyre. Breakers, then, are its played strings. The verb "thrid," being the archaic (or dialect) form of "thread," while conveying the weaving of the sound and meaning from line to line, euphonically also evokes the triangularity of the stanzaic design, which is a triplet. In other words, with the progression from "fire" to "cold" we get here to an artifice that suggests artistic self-consciousness in general and, given the treatment a great tragedy receives in this poem, Hardy's in particular. For, to put it bluntly, "The Convergence of the Twain" is devoid of the "hot" feelings that might seem appropriate, given the volume of human loss. This is an entirely unsentimental job, and in the second stanza our poet reveals somewhat (most likely unwittingly) the way it's done.

> Over the mirrors meant
> To glass the opulent
> The sea-worm crawls – grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

This is where, I believe, the poem's reputation for social criticism comes from. It is there, of course, but that's the least of it. The *Titanic* was indeed a floating palace. The ballroom, casino, and cabins themselves were built to redefine luxury on the grandest scale, their decor was lavish. To convey this, the poet uses the verb "to glass," which both doubles the opulence and betrays its one-dimensionality: it is glass-deep. However, in the scene Mr. Hardy paints here, he is concerned less, I think, with debunking the rich than with the discrepancy between the intent and the outcome. The sea-worm crawling over the mirror stands in not for the essence of capitalism but for "the opulent" 's opposite.

The succession of negative epithets qualifying that sea-worm tells us quite a lot about Mr. Hardy himself. For in order to know the value of a negative epithet, one should always try applying it to oneself first. Being a poet, not to mention a novelist, Thomas Hardy would have done that more than once. Therefore, the succession of negative epithets here could and should be perceived as reflecting his hierarchy of human wrongs, the gravest being the last on the list. And the last on this list, sitting above all in the rhyming position, is "indifferent." This renders "grotesque, slimed, dumb" as lesser evils. At least

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from the point of view of this poet, they are; and one can't help thinking that the gravity "indifferent" is burdened with in this context is perhaps self-referential.

> Jewels in joy designed
> To ravish the sensuous mind
> Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

Perhaps this is as good a time as any to point to the cinematic, frame-by-frame procedure our poet resorts to here, and the fact that he is doing this in 1912, long before film became a daily – well, nightly – reality. I believe I've said someplace that it was poetry that invented the technique of montage, not Eisenstein. A vertical arrangement of identical stanzas on the page is a film. A couple of years ago a salvaging company trying to raise the *Titanic* showed its footage of the ship on TV; it was remarkably close to the matter at hand. Their emphasis was obviously on the contents of the ship's vault, which among other things might have contained a manuscript of Joseph Conrad's most recent novel, which was sent by the author to his American publisher with the ship, since it was to be the speediest mail carrier, among other virtues. The camera circled in the vault area incessantly, attracted by the smell of its riches, but to no avail. Thomas Hardy does a far better job.

"Jewels in joy designed" practically glitters with its *j*'s and *s*'s. So again does, with its swishing and hissing *s*'s, the next line. Yet the most fascinating use of alliteration is on display in the third line, where the ravished, sensuous mind goes flat, as all the line's *l*'s crackle and burst in "sparkles," turning the jewels in "bleared and black and blind" into so many released bubbles rising to the line's end. The alliteration is literally undoing itself in front of our eyes.

It is more rewarding to admire the poet's ingenuity here than to read into this line a sermon on the ephemeral and destructive nature of riches. Even if the latter were his concern, the emphasis would be on the paradox itself rather than the social commentary. Had Thomas Hardy been fifty years younger at the time of the composition of "The Convergence of the Twain," he perhaps might have sharpened the social edge of the poem a bit more, though even this is doubtful. As it was, he was seventy-two years old, fairly well off himself; and among the fifteen hundred souls lost when the *Titanic* went down, two were his personal acquaintances. However, on his underwater journey, he is not looking for them either.

> Dim moon-eyed fishes near
> Gaze at the gilded gear
> And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"

"Gaze at the gilded gear" has obviously crept into the second line of this stanza by pure alliterative inertia (the author presumably had other word combinations

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to consider working up the last stanza, and this is just one of the spin-offs), which serves to recapitulate the ship's ostentatiousness. Fish are seen here as if through a porthole, hence the magnifying glass effect dilating the fish eyes and making them moonlike. Of much greater consequence, however, is this stanza's third line, which concludes the exposition and serves as the springboard for the poem's main business.

"And query: 'What does this vaingloriousness down here?' " is not only a rhetorical turn setting up the rest of the poem to provide the answer to the question posed by the line. It is first of all the recapturing of the oratorical posture, somewhat diluted by the lengthy exposition. To achieve that, the poet heightens his diction here, by combining the legalese of "query" with the clearly ecclesiastical "vaingloriousness." The latter's five-syllable-long hulk marvelously evokes the cumbersomeness of the ship at the sea's bottom. Apart from this, though, both the legalese and the ecclesiastical clearly point to a stylistic shift and a change of the whole discourse's plane of regard.

> Well: while was fashioning
> This creature of cleaving wing,
> The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything
>
> Prepared a sinister mate
> For her – so gaily great –
> A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

Now, "Well" here both disarms and signals a regrouping. It's a colloquial conceit, designed both to put the audience a bit off guard – should "vaingloriousness" have put it on alert – and to pump some extra air into the speaker's lungs as he embarks on a lengthy, extremely loaded period. Resembling somewhat the speech mannerisms of our fortieth President, "Well" here indicates that the movie part of the poem is over and now the discourse begins in earnest. It appears that the subject, after all, is not submarine fauna but Mr. Hardy's – as well as poetry's very own, ever since the days of Lucretius – concept of causality.

"Well: while was fashioning/This creature of cleaving wing" informs the public – syntactically, above all – that we are beginning from afar. More important the subordinate clause preceding the Immanent Will statement exploits to the hilt the ship's gender designation in our language. We've got three words here with increasingly feminine connotations, whose proximity to each other adds up to an impression of deliberate emphasis. "Fashioning" could have been a fairly neutral reference to shipbuilding were it not qualified by "this creature," with its overtones of particular fondness, and were "this creature" itself not side-lit by "cleaving." There is more of "cleavage" in "cleaving" than of "cleaver," which, while denoting the movement of the ship's prow through the water, also echoes a type of sail with its whiteness, resembling a blade. In any case, the con-

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junction of "cleaving wing" – and "wing" itself especially, sitting here in the rhyming position – pitches the line sufficiently high for Mr. Hardy to usher in a notion central to his entire mental operation, that of "The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything."

Hexameter gives this notion's skeptical grandeur full play. The caesura separates the formula from the qualifier in the most natural way, letting us fully appreciate the almost thundering reverberations of consonants in "Immanent Will," as well as the resolute assertiveness "that stirs and urges everything." The latter is all the more impressive thanks to the reserve in the line's dactyls – which borders, in fact, on hesitation – detectable in "everything." Third in the stanza, this line is burdened with the inertia of resolution, and gives you a feeling the entire poem has been written for the sake of this statement.

Why? Because if one could speak of Mr. Hardy's philosophical outlook (if one can speak about a poet's philosophy at all, since, given the omniscient nature of language alone, such discourse is doomed to be reductive by definition), one would have to admit that the notion of Immanent Will was paramount to it. Now, it all harks back to Schopenhauer, with whom the sooner you get acquainted the better – not so much for Mr. Hardy's sake as for your own. Schopenhauer will save you quite a trip; more exactly, his notion of the Will, which he introduced in his *The World as Will and Idea,* will. Every philosophical system, you see, can easily be charged with being essentially a solipsistic, if not downright anthropomorphic, endeavor. By and large they all are, precisely because they are systems and thus imply a varying – usually quite high – degree of rationality of overall design. Schopenhauer escapes this charge with his Will, which is his term for the phenomenal world's inner essence; better yet, for a ubiquitous nonrational force and its blind, striving power operating in the world. Its operations are devoid of ultimate purpose or design and are not many a philosopher's incarnations of rational or moral order. In the end, of course, this notion can also be charged with being a human self-projection. Yet it can defend itself better than others with its horrific, meaningless omniscience, permeating all forms of struggle for existence but voiced (from Schopenhauer's point of view, presumably only echoed) by poetry alone. Small wonder that Thomas Hardy, with his appetite for the infinite and the inanimate, zeroed in on this notion; small wonder that he capitalizes it in this line, for whose sake one may think the entire poem was written.

It wasn't:

> Prepared a sinister mate
> For her – so gaily great –
> A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

For if you give four stars to that line, how are you to rank "A Shape of Ice,

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for the time far and dissociate"? Or, for that matter, "a sinister mate"? As conjunctions go, it is so far ahead of 1912! It's straight out of Auden. Lines like that are invasions of the future into the present, they are whiffs of the Immanent Will themselves. The choice of "mate" is absolutely marvelous, since apart from alluding to "shipmate," it again underscores the ship's femininity, sharpened even further by the next trimeter: "For her – so gaily great – "

What we are getting here, with increasing clarity, is not so much collision as a metaphor for romantic union as the other way around: the union as a metaphor for the collision. The femininity of the ship and the masculinity of the iceberg are clearly established. Except that it is not exactly the iceberg. The real mark of our poet's genius is in his offering a circumlocution: "A Shape of Ice." Its menacing power is directly proportionate to the reader's ability to fashion that shape according to his own imagination's negative potential. In other words, this circumlocution – actually, its letter *a* alone – insinuates the reader into the poem as an active participant.

Practically the same job is performed by "for the time far and dissociate." Now, "far" as an epithet attached to time is commonplace; any poet could do it. But it takes Hardy to use in verse the utterly unpoetic "dissociate." This is the benefit of the general stylistic nonchalance of his we commented on earlier. There are no good, bad, or neutral words for this poet: they are either functional or not. This could be put down, of course, to his experience with prose, were it not for his frequently stated abhorrence of the smooth, "jewelled line."

And "dissociate" is about as unglittering as it is functional. It bespeaks not only the Immanent Will's farsightedness but time's own disjointed nature: not in the Shakespearean but in the purely metaphysical – which is to say, highly perceptible, tactile, mundane – sense. The latter is what makes any member of the audience identify with the disaster's participants, placing him or her within time's atomizing domain. What ultimately saves "dissociate," of course, is its being rhymed, with the attendant aspect of resolution moreover, in the third, hexametric line.

Actually, in the last two stanzas, the rhymes get better and better: engaging and unpredictable. To appreciate "dissociate" fully, perhaps, one should try reading the stanza's rhymes vertically, column-wise. One would end up with "mate – great – dissociate." This is enough to give one a shudder, and this is far from being gratuitous, since the succession clearly emerged in the poet's mind before the stanza was finished. In fact, this succession was precisely what allowed him to finish the stanza, and to do it the way he did.

> And as the smart ship grew
> In stature, grace, and hue
> In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

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And so it emerges that we are dealing with the betrothed. With the feminine smart ship engaged early on to a Shape of Ice. A construction to nature. Almost a brunette to a blonde. Something was growing in Plymouth docks toward that which was growing "In shadowy silent distance" somewhere in the North Atlantic. The hushed, conspiratorial "shadowy silent distance" underscores the secretive, intimate character of this information, and the stresses falling almost mechanically on each word in this stanza sort of echo time's measured pace – the pace of this maid's and her mate's advancement toward one another. For it is that pace that makes the encounter inevitable, not the pair's individual features.

What also makes their approach inexorable is the excess of rhyme in this stanza. "Grew" creeps into the third line, making this triplet contain four rhymes. That could be regarded, of course, as a cheap effect, were it not for the rhyme's sound. "Grew – hue – too" has, as a euphonic referent, the word "you," and the second "grew" triggers the reader's realization of his/her involvement in the story, and not as its addressee only.

> Alien they seemed to be:
> No mortal eye could see
> The intimate welding of their later history . . .

In the euphonic context of the last four stanzas, "Alien" comes as an exclamation, its wide-open vowels being like the last cry of the doomed before submitting to the unavoidable. It's like "not guilty" on the scaffold, or "I don't love him" before the altar: pale face turned to the public. And the altar it is, for "welding" as well as "history" in the third line sound like homonyms for "wedding" and "destiny." So "No mortal eye could see" is not so much the poet's bragging about being privy to the workings of causality as the voice of a Father Lorenzo.

> Or sign that they were bent
> By paths coincident
> On being anon twin halves of one august event,

Again, no poet in his right mind, unless his is Gerard Manley Hopkins's, would stud a line with stresses in such a hammering manner. And not even Hopkins would dare to use in verse "anon" like this. Is this our old friend Mr. Hardy's abhorrence of the smooth line, reaching here a degree of perversity? Or a further attempt to obscure, with this Middle English equivalent of "at once," a "mortal eye" 's ability to see what he, the poet, sees? An elongation of the perspective? Going for those coincident paths of origin? His only concession to the standard view of the disaster? Or just a heightening of the pitch, the way "august" does, in view of the poem's finale, to pave the way for the Immanent Will's saying its piece:

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Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

"Everything" that the Immanent Will "stirs and urges" presumably includes time. Hence the Immanent Will's new billing: "Spinner of the Years." This is a bit too personified for the abstract notion's abstract good, but we may put this down to the ecclesiastical architect's inertia in Hardy. He comes uncomfortably close here to equating the meaningless with the malevolent, whereas Schopenhauer pushes precisely the blind mechanistic – which is to say, nonhuman – nature of that Will, whose presence is recognized by all forms of existence, both animate and inanimate, through stress, conflict, tension, and, as in the case at hand, through disaster.

This, in the final analysis, is what lies behind his poetry's quite ubiquitous predilection for the dramatic anecdote. The nonhumanity of the ultimate truth about the phenomenal world fires up his imagination the way female beauty does many a Lothario's. A biological determinist, on the one hand, he eagerly, as it were, embraces Schopenhauer's notion not only because it amounts in his mind to the source of completely unpredictable and otherwise unaccountable occurrences (unifying thus the "far and dissociate") but also, one suspects, to account for his own "indifference."

You could bill him as a rational irrationalist, of course, but that would be a mistake, since the concept of Immanent Will is not irrational. No, quite the contrary. It is highly uncomfortable, not to say menacing, perhaps; but that is a different matter altogether. Discomfort shouldn't be equated with irrationality any more than rationality with comfort. Still, this is the wrong place for nitpicking. One thing is clear: the Immanent Will for our poet has the status of Supreme Entity, bordering on that of Prime Mover. Fittingly, then, it speaks in monosyllables; fittingly, also, it says, "Now."

The most fitting word in this last stanza, however, is, of course, "consummation," since the collision occurred at night. With "consummation" we have the marital union trope seen, as it were, to the end. "Jars," with its allusion to broken earthenware, is more this trope's residue than its enhancement. It is a stunning verb here, making the two hemispheres, which the "maiden" voyage of the *Titanic* was supposed to connect, into two clashing convex receptacles. It looks as if it was precisely the notion of "maiden" that struck the chord of our poet's "lyre" first.

VI

The question is why, and the answer arrives in the form of a cycle of poems written by Mr. Hardy a year after "The Convergence of the Twain," the famous

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Poems of 1912-13. As we are about to embark on discussing one of them, let's bear in mind that the feminine ship was lost and that the masculine Shape of Ice survived the encounter. That the remarkable lack of sentimentality, warranted in principle by both the genre and the subject of the poem, could be attributed to our poet's inability to identify here with the loser, if only because of the ship's gender.

Poems of 1912-13 was occasioned by the poet's loss of his wife of thirty-eight years, Emma Lavinia Gifford, who died on November 27, 1912, eight months after the *Titanic* disaster. Twenty-one pieces in all, these poems amount to the Shape of Ice's meltdown.

To make a long story short, the marriage was long and unhappy enough to give "The Convergence of the Twain" its central metaphor. It was also sufficiently solid to make at least one of its participants regard himself as a plaything of the Immanent Will, and, as such playthings go, a cold one. Had Emma Hardy outlived her husband, this poem would stand as a remarkable, albeit oblique, monument to the morose equilibrium of their dissociate lives, to the low temperature of the poet's heart.

The sudden death of Emma Hardy shattered this equilibrium. In a manner of speaking, the Shape of Ice suddenly found itself on its very own. In another manner of speaking, *Poems of 1912-13* is essentially this Iceberg's lament for the vanished ship. As such, it is a meticulous reconstruction of the casualty; the by-product, naturally, of an excruciating self-examination rather than a metaphysical quest for the tragedy's origins. After all, no casualty can be redeemed by exposing its causality.

That's why this cycle is essentially retrospective. To make a long story still shorter, its heroine is not Emma Hardy, the wife, but precisely Emma Lavinia Gifford, the bride: a maiden. The poems look at her through the dim prism of forty-three years of marriage, through the foggy hard crystal of Emma Hardy herself. If this cycle has a hero, it is the past with its happiness or, to put it a bit more accurately, with its promise of happiness.

As human predicaments go, the story is sufficiently common. As a subject for elegiac poetry, the loss of the beloved is common as well. What makes *Poems of 1912-13* slightly unusual at the outset is not only the age of the poet and his heroine but the sheer number of poems and their formal variety. A characteristic feature with elegies occasioned by someone's demise is their tonal, to say the least, metric uniformity. In the case of this cycle, however, we have a remarkable metric diversity, which points to the possibility that craftsmanship was a no lesser issue for the poet here than the issue itself.

A psychological explanation for this variety might be, of course, that it has to do with our poet's grief searching for an adequate form of expression. Still, the formal intricacy of the twenty-one attempts made in that direction suggests a greater pressure behind this cycle than pure grief or, for that matter, any single

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sentiment. So let us take a look at perhaps the least stanzaically enterprising among these poems and try to find out what's going on.

YOUR LAST DRIVE

Here by the moorway you returned,
And saw the borough lights ahead
That lit your face – all undiscerned
To be in a week the face of the dead,
And you told of the charm of that haloed view
That never again would beam on you.

And on your left you passed the spot
Where eight days later you were to lie,
And be spoken of as one who was not;
Beholding it with a heedless eye
As alien from you, though under its tree
You soon would halt everlastingly.

I drove not with you . . . Yet had I sat
At your side that eve I should not have seen
That the countenance I was glancing at
Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
Nor have read the writing upon your face,
"I go hence soon to my resting-place;

"You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed,
And even your praises no more shall need."

True: never you'll know. And you will not mind.
But shall I then slight you because of such?
Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
The thought "What profit," move me much?
Yet abides the fact, indeed, the same, –
You are past love, praise, indifference, blame.

"Your Last Drive" is the second in the cycle and, according to the date underneath, was written less than a month after Emma Hardy's death, i.e., when the shock of her departure was very fresh. Ostensibly an evocation of her returning home in the evening from a routine outing that proved to be her last, the poem for its first two stanzas appears to explore the paradox of the interplay between

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motion and stasis. The carriage carrying the heroine past the place where she shortly will be buried seems to arrest the poet's imagination as a metaphor either of mobility's myopic vision of immobility or of space's disregard for either. In any case, the mental input in these stanzas is somewhat larger than the sentimental one, though the latter comes first.

More accurately, the poem strays from the emotional into the rational, and rather quickly so. In this sense, it is indeed vintage Hardy, for the trend is seldom the reverse with him. Besides, every poem is a means of transportation by definition, and this one is only more so, since metrically at least it is about a means of transportation. With its iambic tetrameter and the shifting caesura that makes its fifth line slide into an anapest, its stanza wonderfully conveys the tilting movement of a horse-driven carriage, and the closing couplets mimic its arrival. As is inevitable with Hardy, this pattern is sustained throughout the poem.

We first see the features of the cycle's heroine lit – most likely dimly – by "the borough lights ahead." The lighting here is more cinematic than poetic; nor does the word "borough" heighten the diction much – something you would expect when it comes to the heroine's appearance. Instead, a line and a half are expended on stressing – literally, and with a touch of tautological relish – her lack of awareness of the impending transformation into being "the face of the dead." In effect, her features are absent; and the only explanation for our poet's not grabbing this opportunity to depict them is the prospect of the cycle already existing in his head (although no poet is ever sure of his ability to produce the next poem). What's present of her, however, in this stanza is her speech, echoed in "And you told of the charm of that haloed view." One hears in this line her "It's charming," and conceivably, "Such a halo!" as she was by all accounts a churchgoing woman.

The second stanza sticks to the "moorway" topography no less than to the chronology of events. Apparently the heroine's outing occurred one week – perhaps slightly less – before she died, and she was interred on the eighth day at this place, apparently to her left as she drove home by the moorway. Such literalness may owe here to the poet's deliberately reining in his emotion, and "spot" suggests a conscious deflation. It is certainly in keeping with the notion of a carriage trundling along, supported, as it were, by leafsprings of tetrameters. Yet knowing Hardy's appetite for detail, for the mundane, one may as well assume that no special effort was applied here and no special significance was sought. He simply registers the pedestrian manner in which an absurdly drastic change has taken place.

Hence the next line, which is the highest point in this stanza. In "And be spoken of as one who was not," one detects the sense not so much of loss or unbearable absence as that of all-consuming negation. "One who was not" is too resolute for comfort or, for that matter, for discomfort, and negation of an individual is what death is all about. Therefore, "Beholding it with a heedless

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eye/As alien from you" is not a scolding but rather an admission of the appropriate response. With ". . . though under its tree/You soon would halt everlastingly" the carriage and the exposition part of the poem indeed come to a halt.

Essentially, the central theme of these two stanzas is their heroine's lack of any inkling or premonition of her approaching end. This could be perceived as a remarkable expectation indeed, were it not for her age. Besides, although throughout the cycle the poet insists on the suddenness of Emma Hardy's demise, it's obvious from other sources that she was afflicted with several ailments, including a mental disorder. But presumably there was something about her that made him convinced of her durability; perhaps that had to do with his notion of himself as the Immanent Will's plaything.

And although many would regard the third stanza's opening as heralding the theme of guilt and remorse that the same many would detect in the whole cycle, "I drove not with you" is just a restatement of that premonition's requirement; worse comes to worse, of his probable failure at obtaining it. The next line and a half postulate quite resolutely that probability, ruling out grounds for the speaker's self-reproach on that account. Yet for the first time, true lyricism creeps into the poem: first through the ellipsis, secondly through "Yet had I sat/At your side that eve" (which is, of course, a reference to his not being at her side at the moment of death). It takes over in full force with "That the countenance I was glancing at," where all the consonants of "countenance" vibrate, giving you a passenger's silhouette swaying from side to side because of the carriage's movement, seen against the light. The treatment again is quite cinematic, the film being black-and-white. One could throw "*flick*ering" into the bargain, were it not 1912.

And were it not for the starkness of "Had a last-time look" (still, perceptions often run ahead of technology, and as we said earlier, montage wasn't invented by Eisenstein). This starkness both enhances and shatters the almost loving tentativeness of "the countenance I was glancing at," betraying the poet's eagerness to escape a reverie for the truth, as though the latter is more rewarding.

A reverie he certainly escapes, but he pays for that with the monstrous next line: with recalling the heroine's actual features in "Nor have read the writing upon your face." The reference here, obviously, is to the writing upon the wall, whose inescapable equation with the heroine's appearance tells us enough about the state of the union prior to her death. What informs this equation is his sense of her impenetrability, and that's what the poem was all about thus far, since this impenetrability applies to the past about as much as it does to the future, and it's a quality she happens to share with the future generally. Thus his reading of Emma's equivalent of "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" here is no fantasy.

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"I go hence soon to my resting-place;

"You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed,
And even your praises no more shall need."

And here is our heroine, verbatim. Because of the deftly blended tenses, this is a voice from beyond the grave as much as from the past. And it is relentless. With every next sentence, she takes away what she has given a sentence before. And what she gives and takes is obviously his humanity. This way she reveals herself to be indeed a good match for her poet. There is a strong echo of marital argument in these lines, the intensity of which overcomes completely the listlessness of the verse. It gets much louder here and drowns the sound of the carriage wheels on the cobblestones. To say the least, dead, Emma Hardy is capable of invading her poet's future to the point of making him defend himself.

What we have in this stanza is essentially an apparition. And although the cycle's epigraph – "Traces of an old flame" – is taken from Virgil, this particular passage bears a very close resemblance, both in pitch and substance – to the famous elegy by Sextus Propertius, from his "Cynthia Monobiblos." The last two lines in this stanza, in any case, sound like a good translation of Cynthia's final plea: "And as for your poems in my honor, burn them, burn them!"

The only escape from such negation is into the future, and that's the route our poet takes: "True: never you'll know." That future, however, should be fairly distant, since its foreseeable part, the poet's present, is already occupied. Hence, "And you will not mind" and "But shall I then slight you because of such?" Still, with that escape comes – in this last stanza's first line especially – a piercing recognition of the ultimate parting, of the growing distance. Characteristically, Hardy handles this line with terrific reserve, allowing only a sigh to escape in the caesura and a slight elevation of pitch in "mind." Yet the suppressed lyricism bursts into the open and claims its own in "Dear ghost."

He indeed addresses an apparition, but one that's free of any ecclesiastical dimension. This is not a particularly mellifluous form of address, which alone convinces one of its literalness. He is not searching here for a tactful alternative. (What could there be instead? The meter, allotting him here only two syllables, rules out "Dear Emma"; what then, "Dear friend"?) A ghost she is, and not because she is dead, but because though less than a physical reality she is far more than just a memory: she is an entity he can address, a presence – or absence – he is familiar with. It's not the inertia of marriage but of time itself – thirty-eight years of it – that solidifies into a substance that may be, he feels, only hardened by his future, which is but another increment of time.

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Hence, "Dear ghost." Thus designated, she can almost be touched. Or else "ghost" is the ultimate in detachment. And for somebody who ran the whole gamut of attitudes available to one human being vis-à-vis another, from pure love to total indifference – "ghost" offers one more possibility, if you will, a postscript, a sum total. "Dear ghost" is uttered here indeed with an air of discovery and of summary, which is what, in fact, the poem offers two lines later: "Yet abides the fact, indeed, the same, –/You are past love, praise, indifference, blame." This describes not only the condition of a ghost but also a new attitude attained by the poet – an attitude that permeates the cycle of *Poems 1912-13* and without which that cycle wouldn't be possible.

This finale's enumeration of attitudes is tactically similar to "The Convergence of the Twain" 's "grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent." Yet while it is propelled by similar self-deprecating logic, it adds up not to the reductive ("choose one") precision of analysis but to an extraordinary emotional summary that redefines the genre of funeral elegy no less than that of love poetry itself. Immediate as the former, "Your Last Drive" amounts, on account of its finale, to a much-delayed postscript, rarely encountered in poetry, to what love amounts to. Such a summary is obviously the minimal requirement for engaging a ghost in a dialogue, and the last line has an engaging, indeed somewhat flirtatious air. Our old man is wooing the inanimate.

VII

Every poet learns from his own breakthroughs, and Hardy, with his professed tendency to "exact a full look at the worst," seems to profit in, and from, *Poems of 1912-13* enormously. For all its riches of detail and topographical reference, the cycle has an oddly universal, almost impersonal quality, since it deals with the extremes of the emotional spectrum. "A full look at the worst" is well matched by a full look at the best, with very short shrift given to the mean. It is as though a book were being rifled through from the end to the beginnning before being shelved.

It never got shelved. A rationalist more than an emotionalist, Hardy, of course, saw the cycle as an opportunity to rectify what many and in part he himself regarded as a lyrical deficiency in his poetry. And true enough, *Poems of 1912-13* does constitute a considerable departure from his pattern of graveyard musing, grand on metaphysics and yet usually rather bland sentimentally. That's what accounts for the cycle's enterprising stanzaic architecture, but above all for its zeroing in on the initial stage of his marital union: on meeting a maiden.

In theory, that encounter ensures an upsurge of positive sentiment, and at times it does. But it was so long ago that the optic of intro- and retrospection often proves insufficient. As such it gets unwittingly replaced by the lens habitually employed by our poet for pondering his beloved infinites. Immanent Wills, and all, exacting a full look at the worst.

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It seems he's got no other instruments anyway: whenever faced with a choice between a moving or a drastic utterance, he normally goes for the latter. This may be attributed to certain aspects of Mr. Hardy's character or temperament; a more appropriate attribution would be to the métier itself.

For poetry for Thomas Hardy was above all a tool of cognition. His correspondence as well as his prefaces to various editions of his work are full of disclaimers of a poet's status; they often emphasize the diaristic, commentary role his poetry had for him. I think this can be taken at face value. We should bear in mind also that the man was an autodidact, and autodidacts are always more interested in the essence of what they are learning than its actual data. When it comes to poetry, this boils down to an emphasis on revelatory capacity, often at the expense of harmony.

To be sure, Hardy went to extraordinary lengths to master harmony, and his craftsmanship often borders on the exemplary. Still, it is just craftsmanship. He is no genius at harmony; his lines seldom sing. The music available in his poems is a mental music, and as such it is absolutely unique. The main distinction of Thomas Hardy's verse is that its formal aspects – rhyme, meter, alliteration, etc. – are precisely the aspects standing in attendance to the driving force of his thought. In other words, they seldom generate that force; their main job is to usher in an idea and not to obstruct its progress.

I suppose if asked what he values more in a poem – the insight or the texture – he would cringe, but ultimately he would give the autodidact's reply: the insight. This is, then, the criterion by which one is to judge his work, and this cycle in particular. It is the extension of human insight that he sought in this study of the extremes of estrangement and attachment, rather than pure self-expression. In this sense, this premodernist was without peer. In this sense also, his poems are indeed a true reflection of the métier itself, whose operational mode, too, is the fusion of the rational and the intuitive. It could be said, however, that he turned the tables somewhat: he was intuitive about his work's substance; as for his verse's formal aspects, he was excessively rational.

For that he paid dearly. A good example of this could be his "In the Moonlight," written a couple of years later but in a sense belonging to *Poems of 1912-13* – if not necessarily thematically, then by virtue of its psychological vector.

> "O lonely workman, standing there
> In a dream, why do you stare and stare
> At her grave, as no other grave there were?
>
> "If your great gaunt eyes so importune
> Her soul by the shine of this corpse-cold moon
> Maybe you'll raise her phantom soon!"

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"Why, fool, it is what I would rather see
Than all the living folk there be;
But alas, there is no such joy for me!"

"Ah – she was one you loved, no doubt,
Through good and evil, through rain and drought,
And when she passed, all your sun went out?"

"Nay: she was the woman I did not love,
Whom all the others were ranked above,
Whom during her life I thought nothing of."

Like an extremely high percentage of Hardy's verse, the poem seems to hark back to the folk ballad, with its use of dialogue and its element of social commentary. The mock romantic opening and the nagging lapidary tone of triplets – not to mention the poem's very title – suggest a polemical aspect to "In the Moonlight" when viewed within the contemporary poetic discourse. The poem is obviously a "variation on a theme" frequent enough in Hardy's own work in the first place.

The overtones of social commentary, usually fairly sharp in a ballad, are somewhat muted here, though not entirely. Rather, they are subordinated to the psychological thrust of the poem. It is extremely shrewd of the poet to make precisely a "workman," and not the urbane, sneering passerby the carrier of the loaded, terrifying insight revealed in the last stanza. For normally a crisis-ridden conscience in literature is the property of the educated classes. Here, however, it is an uncouth, almost plebeian "workman" who weighs in with at once the most menacing and the most tragic admission Hardy's verse ever made.

Yet although the syntax here is fairly clear, the meter sustained, and the psychology powerful, the poem's texture undermines its mental achievement with its triple rhyme, warranted neither by the story line nor, what's worse, its own quality. In short, the job is expert but not particularly rewarding. We get the poem's vector, not its target. But as far as the truth about the human heart is concerned, this vector may be enough. That's what the poet, one imagines, has told himself on this and on many other occasions. For the full look at the worst blinds you to your own appearance.

VIII

Blissfully, Hardy lived long enough not to be trapped by either his achievements or his failures. Therefore, we may concentrate on his achievements, perhaps with an additional sense of their humanity or, if you will, independent of it. Here's one of them, a poem called "Afterwards." It was written somewhere around 1917, when quite a lot of people all over the place were busy doing each other in and when our poet was seventy-seven years old.

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When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
"He was a man who used to notice such things"?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
"To him this must have been a familiar sight."

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, "He strove that such innocent creatures should come
to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone."

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
"He was one who had an eye for such mysteries"?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
"He hears it not now, but used to notice such things"?

These twenty hexametric lines are the glory of English poetry, and they owe all that they've got precisely to hexameter. The good question is to what does hexameter itself owe its appearance here, and the answer is so that the old man can breathe more easily. Hexameter is here not for its epic or by the same classical token elegiac connotations but for its trimeter-long, inhale-exhale properties. On the subconscious level, this comfort translates into the availability of time, into a generous margin. Hexameter, if you will, is a moment stretched, and with every next word Thomas Hardy in "Afterwards" stretches it even further.

The conceit in this poem is fairly simple: while considering his immanent passing, the poet produces cameo representations of each one of the four seasons as his departure's probable backdrop. Remarkably well served by its title and free of the emotional investment usually accompanying a poet when such prospects are entertained, the poem proceeds at a pace of melancholy meditation – which is what Mr. Hardy, one imagines, wanted it to be. It appears, however, that somewhere along the way the poem escaped his control and things began to occur in it not according to the initial plan. In other words, art has overtaken craft.

But first things first, and the first season here is spring, which is ushered in

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with an awkward, almost creaking septuagenarian elegance: no sooner does May get in than it is hit by a stress. This is all the more noticeable after the indeed highly arch and creaking "When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay," with its wonderfully hissing confluence of sibilants toward the end of the line. "Tremulous stay" is a splendid conjunction, evocative, one would imagine, of the poet's very voice at this stage, and thus setting the tone for the rest of the poem.

Of course, we have to bear in mind that we are viewing the whole thing through the prism of the modern, late-twentieth-century idiom in poetry. What seems arch and antiquated through this lens wouldn't necessarily have produced the same effect at the time. When it comes to generating circumlocutions, death has no equals, and at the Last Judgment it could cite them in its defense. And as such circumlocutions go, "When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay" is wonderful if only because it shows a poet more concerned with his diction than with the prospect he describes. There is a peace in this line, not least because the stressed words here are two and three syllables long; the unstressed syllables play the rest of these words down with the air of a postscript or an afterthought.

Actually, the stretching of the hexameter – i.e., time – and filling it up begins with "tremulous stay." But things really get busy once the stress hits "May" in the second line, which consists solely of monosyllables. Euphonically, the net result in the second line is an impression that Mr. Hardy's spring is more rich in leaf than any August. Psychologically, however, one has the sense of piling-up qualifiers spilling well into the third line, with its hyphenated, Homer-like epithets. The overall sensation (embodied in the future perfect tense) is that of time slowed down, stalled by its every second, for that's what monosyllabic words are: uttered – or printed – seconds.

"The best eye for natural detail," enthused Yvor Winters about Thomas Hardy. And we, of course, can admire this eye sharp enough to liken the reverse side of a leaf to newly spun silk – but only at the expense of praising the ear. As you read these lines out loud, you stumble through the second, and you've got to mumble fast through the first half of the third. And it occurs to you that the poet has stuffed these lines with so much natural detail not for its own sake but for reasons of metric vacancy.

The truth, of course, is that it's both: that's your real natural detail: the ratio of, say, a leaf to the amount of space in a line. It may fit, and then it may not. This is the way a poet learns the value of that leaf as well as of those available stresses. And it is to alleviate the syllabic density of the preceding line that Mr. Hardy produces the almost trochaic "Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk" qualifier, not out of attachment to this leaf and this particular sensation. Had he been attached to them, he'd have moved them to the rhyming position, or in any case out of the tonal limbo where you find them.

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Still, technically speaking, this line and a half do show off what Mr. Winters appreciates so much about our poet. And our poet himself is cognizant of trotting out natural detail here, and polishing it up a bit on top of that. And this is what enables him to wrap it up with the colloquial " 'He was a man who used to notice such things.' " This understatement, nicely counterbalancing the opening line's ramshackle grandeur, is what he was perhaps after in the first place. It's highly quotable, so he attributes it to the neighbors, clearing the line of the charge of self-consciousness, let alone of being an auto-epitaph.

There is no way for me to prove this – though there is also no way to refute it – but I think the first and last lines, "When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay" and " 'He was a man who used to notice such things,' " existed long before "Afterwards" was conceived, independently. Natural detail got in between them by chance, because it provided a rhyme (not a very spectacular one, so it needed a qualifier). Once there, it gave the poet a stanza, and with that came the pattern for the rest of the poem. These particular things, then, don't actually seem to be waht he's noticing; its the *idea* of noticing in a particular way.

One indication of this is the uncertainty of the season in the next stanza. I'd suggest it's autumn, since the stanzas after deal respectively with summer and winter; and the leafless thorn seems fallow and chilled. This succession is slightly odd in Hardy, who is a superb plotter and who, you might think, would be one to handle the seasons in the traditional, orderly manner. That said, however, the second stanza is a work of unique beauty.

It all starts with yet another confluence of sibilants in "eyelid's soundless blink." Again, proving and refuting may be a problem, but I tend to think that "an eyelid's soundless blink" is a reference to Petrarch's "One life is shorter than an eyelid's blink"; "Afterwards," as we know, is a poem about one's demise.

But even if we abandon the first line with its splendid caesura followed by those two rustling *s*'s between "eyelid's" and "soundless," ending with two more *s*'s, we've got plenty here. First, we have this very cinematographic, slow-motion passage of "The dewfall-hawk" that "comes crossing the shades to alight . . ." And we have to pay attention to his choice of the word "shades," considering our subject. And if we do, we may further wonder about this "dewfall-hawk," about its "dewfall" bit especially. What, we may ask, does this "dewfall," following an eyelid's blink and preceding "shade," try to do here, and is it, perhaps, a well-buried tear? And don't we hear in "to alight/Upon the wind-warped upland thorn" a reined-in or overpowered emotion?

Perhaps we don't. Perhaps all we hear is a pile up of stresses, at best evoking through their "up/warp/up" sound the clapping of wind-pestered shrubs. Against such a backdrop, an impersonal, unreacting "gazer" would be an apt way to describe the onlooker, stripped of any human characteristics, reduced to eyesight. "Gazer" is fitting, since he observes our speaker's absence and thus can't be de-

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scribed in detail: probability can't be terribly particular. Similarly the hawk, batting its wings like eyelids through "the shades," is moving through the same absence. The refrain-like "To him this must have been a familiar sight" is all the more poignant because it cuts both ways: the hawk's flight here is as real as it is posthumous.

On the whole, the beauty of "Afterwards" is that everything in it is multiplied by two.

The next stanza considers, I believe, the summer, and the opening line overwhelms you with its tactility in "mothy and warm," all the more palpable because it is isolated by a very bravely shifted caesura. Yet speaking of bravery, it should be noted that only a very healthy person can ponder the nocturnal blackness of the moment of his demise with such equipoise as we find in "If I pass during some nocturnal blackness . . ." Not to mention more cavalier treatment of the caesura. The only mark of possible alarm here is the "some" before "nocturnal blackness." On the other hand, "some" is one of those readily available bricks a poet uses to save his meter.

Be that as it may, the real winner in this stanza is obviously "When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn" – and within the line itself it is, of course, "furtively." The rest is slightly less animated and certainly less interesting, since our poet is clearly bent on endearing himself to the public with his animal-kingdom sympathies. That's quite unnecessary, since, given the subject, the reader is on his side as it is. Also, if one wanted to be really hard-nosed here, one could query whether that hedgehog was indeed in harm's way. At this stage, however, nobody wants to quibble. But the poet himself seems to be aware of the insufficiency of the material here; so he saddles his hexameter with three additional syllables ("One may say") – partly because the awkwardness of speech, he believes, suggests geniality, partly to stretch the dying man's time – or the time he is remembered.

It is in the fourth, winter stanza that the poem confronts absence in earnest.

> If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
> Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
> Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
> "He was one who had an eye for such mysteries"?

To begin with, being "stilled at last" includes within its euphemistic reach the author taking leave of the poem, as well as the poem's previous stanza growing silent. This way the audience, more numerous than "the neighbors," "a gazer," or "one," is ushered here into the text and asked to play the role of "Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees." This is an extraordinary line; the natural detail here is positively terrifying and practically prefigures Robert Frost. For winter indeed sees more "heavens," since in winter trees are naked and the air is clear. If these heavens are full-starred, it, winter, sees more stars. The line is an

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apotheosis of absence, yet Mr. Hardy seeks to aggravate it further with "Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more." "Rise" imparts to the presumably cold features of the "stilled at last" the temperature of the moon.

Behind all this there is, of course, an old trope about the souls of the dead residing on stars. Still, the optical literalness of this rendition is blinding. Apparently when you see a winter sky you see Thomas Hardy. That's the kind of mystery he had an eye for, in his lifetime.

He had an eye for something closer to the ground, too. As you read "Afterwards," you begin to notice the higher and higher position in the lines of each stanza of those who are to comment on him. From the bottom in the first, they climb to the top in the fifth. This could be a coincidence with anyone other than Hardy. We also have to watch their progression from "the neighbours" to "a gazer" to "one" to "they" to "any." None of these designations is particular, let alone endearing. Well, who are these people?

Before we get to that, let's learn something about "any" and what he expects from them.

> And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
> And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
> Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
> "He hears it not now, but used to notice such things"?

There is no particular season here, which means it's any time. It's any backdrop also, presumably a countryside, with a church in the fields, and its bell tolling. The observation described in the second and third lines is lovely but too common for our poet to claim any distinction for making it. It's his ability to describe it that "any" might refer to by saying in his absence, "He hears it not now, but used to notice such things." Also, "such things" is a sound: interrupted by wind yet returning anew. An interrupted but resuming sound could be regarded here, at the end of this auto-elegy, as a self-referential metaphor, and not because the sound in question is that of a bell tolling for Thomas Hardy.

It is so because an interrupted yet resuming sound is, in fact, a metaphor for poetry: for a succession of poems emerging from under the same pen, for a succession of stanzas within one poem. It is a metaphor for "Afterwards" itself, with all its peregrination of stresses and suddenly halting caesuras. In this sense, the bell of quittance never stops – not Mr. Hardy's, anyway. And it doesn't stop as long as his "neighbors," "gazers," "one," "they," and "any" are us.

IX

Extraordinary claims for a dead poet are best made on the basis of his entire oeuvre; as we are perusing only some of Thomas Hardy's work, we may dodge the temptation. Suffice it to say that he is one of the very few poets who, under minimal scrutiny, easily escape the past. What helps his escape is obviously the

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content of his poems: they are simply extraordinarily interesting to read. And to reread, since their texture is very often pleasure-resistant. That was his whole gamble, and he won.

Out of the past there is only one route, and it takes you into the present. However, Hardy's poetry is not a very comfortable presence here. He is seldom taught, still less read. First, with respect to content at least, he simply overshadows the bulk of poetry's subsequent achievement: a comparison renders too many a modern giant a simpleton. As for the general readership, his thirst for the inanimate comes off as unappealing and disconcerting. Rather than the general public's mental health, this bespeaks its mental diet.

As he escapes the past, and sits awkwardly in the present, one trains one's eye on the future as perhaps his more appropriate niche. It is possible, although the technological and demographic watershed we are witnessing would seem to obliterate any foresight or fantasy based on our own relatively coherent experience. Still, it is possible, and not only because the triumphant Immanent Will might decide to acknowledge, at the peak of its glory, its early champion.

It is possible because Thomas Hardy's poetry makes considerable inroads into what is the target of all cognition: inanimate matter. Our species embarked on this quest long ago, rightly suspecting that we share our own cellular mix-up with the stuff, and that should the truth about the world exist, it's bound to be nonhuman. Hardy is not an exception. What is exceptional about him, however, is the relentlessness of his pursuit, in the course of which his poems began to acquire certain impersonal traits of his very subject, especially tonally. That could be regarded, of course, as camouflage, like wearing fatigues in the trenches.

Like a new line of fashion that set a trend in English poetry in this century: the dispassionate posture became practically the norm, indifference a trope. Still, these were just side effects; I daresay he went after the inanimate – not for its jugular, since it has none, but for its diction.

Come to think of it, the expression "matter-of-fact" could well apply to his idiom, except that the emphasis would be on matter. His poems very often sound as if matter has acquired the power of speech as yet another aspect of its human disguise. Perhaps this was indeed the case with Thomas Hardy. But then it's only natural, because as somebody – most likely it was I – once said, language is the inanimate's first line of information about itself, released to the animate. Or, to put it more accurately, language is a diluted aspect of matter.

It is perhaps because his poems almost invariably (once they exceed sixteen lines) either display the inanimate's touch or else keep an eye on it that the future may carve for him a somewhat larger niche than he occupies in the present. To paraphrase "Afterwards" somewhat, he used to notice unhuman things; hence his "eye for natural detail," and numerous tombstone musings. Whether the future will be able to comprehend the laws governing matter better than it has done thus far remains to be seen. But it doesn't seem to have much choice in ac-

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knowledging a greater degree of human affinity with the inanimate than literature and philosophical thought have been insisting on.

This is what enables one to see in a crystal ball unfamiliar multitudes in odd attire making a run on Hardy's *Collected Works*.

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Democracy in America

THE REVOLT OF THE ELITES AND THE BETRAYAL OF DEMOCRACY. By Christopher Lasch. W. W. Norton Co. $22.00.

Like Tocqueville, Christopher Lasch was troubled primarily about the future of democracy. But whereas one hundred-sixty years ago Tocqueville still could point to the contradictions and hope for their positive resolutions, Lasch was faced with the many wretched turns it had taken in the interim. Thus he questions whether American democracy has a future at all, given "the decline of manufacturing and the consequent loss of jobs; the shrinkage of the middle class; the growing number of the poor; the rising crime rate; the flourishing traffic in drugs; the decay of the cities – the bad news goes on and on." We all have asked ourselves these questions which, when extended beyond America, can be summed up as an update of "The Decline of the West," or of "The Death of the Enlightenment." And yet, I believe, such criticism itself indicates that improvement is possible.

Christopher Lasch did not live to see the publication of this book, but he would be heartened were he to know that his trenchant and historically informed criticism, once again, is being taken most seriously. He has been chided for not offering any solutions. But how could he do so when most politicians, experts, and problem-solvers of both the right and the left, by relying on the certainty of their ideologies, have not been able to resurrect the economy, empower the middle class (which Tocqueville had perceived as dominant), abolish or even diminish poverty and crime, and so on?

If José Ortega y Gasset were alive today, argues Lasch in the leading essay, "The Revolt of the Elites," he would realize that they are the ones who now threaten the social order rather than "the masses." Lasch defines the elite as consisting of intellectuals, professors, financiers, foundation and government officials – in sum all those belonging to the "culture of critical discourse," and whom Alvin Gouldner, in 1979, perceived as the "new class" of political and technical intellectuals who gradually have replaced the "economic aristocracy." But as Lasch points out, "the secular, analytical attitude that now prevails in the higher circles" exaggerates its intellectualism and interest in rationalization, while "minimizing its concern with the capitalist market and frenzied search for profits." This unacknowledged antirationalism, in turn, is said to allow them to "live in a world of abstract concepts and symbols, ranging from

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stock market quotations to visual images produced by Madison Avenue . . . [and to] specialize in the interpretation and deployment of symbolic information."

Lasch borrows the term "symbolic analysts" from Robert Reich, who himself is one of these privileged young people who have been nurtured at the best schools, by the best mentors, in a cosmopolitan atmosphere that helps produce "insights" and "information," and who have learned to operate in teams. Lasch elaborates on how the media acts as an umbrella and godfather for them all, and in its focus on "news" pays more attention to the condemnation by the boxer Mike Tyson (from his prison cell) of the President for "crucifying" his nominee for assistant attorney general Lani Guinier, than it does to the war in Chechnya or the fall of the dollar. And Lasch notes that "Washington has become a parody of Tinseltown, which is exemplified by the fact that movie stars are the President's favorite friends, and that Ross Perot launched his campaign from the *Larry King Show*." While such absurdities will continue to abound, and the confusions of words and images with reality have become routine, this cultural elite no longer "assumes responsibility for the exacting standards without which civilization is impossible." Instead, it has replaced Ortega's mass man as the "spoiled man of human history." Now, the masses have become more conservative and, for instance, "favor limits on abortion, cling to the two-parent family as a source of stability, and resist experiments with alternative lifestyles." Thus they might well show us the way out.

The new elites are arrogant, states Lasch, and our "seemingly democratic system of elite recruitment" leads to results that are far from democratic. Reiterating Michael Young's predictions in *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), Lasch reminds us that educating the most promising children of the lower classes also deprives them of leaders from their own ranks and encourages the new elite to legislate for those they left behind; and that their "compassion" is self-serving, devoid of personal contact with their inferiors as well as of the aristocrats' notions of *noblesse oblige*. But because they have succeeded by dint of merit, this elite feels secure in its privileges and "generates an excessive concern with 'self-esteem'," and its concomitant therapies which, in turn, end up blaming societal rather than personal failures without curing the current ethnic wars. Lasch would prefer a return to old-fashioned nationalism, and to do away with the reorganization between rich and poor that has occurred in the wake of the fruits of the upward mobility that has been mistaken for equality, as he argues in the following essay. But much as he would have wanted to turn back the clock, he was too smart to believe that this was

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possible.

Most of Lasch's critics have recalled that he started out as a man of the left and either have chided him for "moving right" or praised him for being sharply critical of both extremes. At times, it seems as if his occasional leaning towards populism, as well as his concern with values – including religious ones – is a bow to the right. However, he conceptualizes this turn as a given of democracy, as a means of perpetuating earlier American virtues such as independence and self-reliance. At the same time, his glorification of populism allows Lasch to move away from his radicalism while remaining on some sort of political left.

Lasch, of course, advocates racial equality. But he does so as Martin Luther King would have done: "He was a liberal in his social gospel theology but a populist in his insistence that black people had to take responsibility for their lives and in his praise of the petty bourgeois virtues: hard work, sobriety, self-improvement." Had his leadership prevailed, Lasch implies, we would be more likely to have both cultural diversity and the high standards that go with civic virtue and trust, and that defy double standards which "mean second-class citizenship" and make excuses for the "disadvantaged" rather than help push them towards achievement. The integration of our racial contingents has been embittered by the well-meaning attempts to institute social justice along with the help of the social engineering of the mid-sixties: "it led to the rapid deterioration of race relations," since "affirmative action gives black elites access to the municipal bureaucracy and the media but leaves the masses worse off than ever."

Money was no help: because the market tends to put irresistible pressure onto every activity, liberals have had to turn to the state to curtail it. But thereby they have transferred to it many functions that previously were the purview of civic associations – the family, the neighborhood, the church, and so on. Child care workers and social workers, therapists and school teachers in their professionalization militate against the informal, personal interactions that used to occur in smaller settings, so that feelings of community have been lost and "people love humankind" rather than their neighbors. Add to this the belief "by members of the caring class that standards are inherently oppressive . . . and reflect the cultural hegemony of dead white European males," and the respect Lasch perceives as a beneficial component of populism has gone by the wayside. And since organized communitarianism interferes with personal autonomy, he does not perceive it as a viable solution either.

In the rest of the book Lasch decries the loss of conversation, of public places and spaces including the tavern, which cannot be qualitatively replaced by television, the shopping mall and fast-food places.

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Therefore, generations as well fail to properly interact which, in turn, deprives the young of a "natural" sort of guidance, and sociability has to "retreat" into private domains.

Whereas in his first book, *The New Radicalism in America* (1963), Lasch showed how and why it was so difficult in our century to be both a radical and a liberal intellectual at the same time, and his best-selling book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978), demonstrated that Americans had become narcissistic and were overly oriented towards therapies and satisfactions of the self, the current volume elaborates on these themes but focuses on the dilemmas and double-binds we as a society must come to terms with. But this will not be possible, Lasch keeps implying, as long as we think we may succeed to build personal self-esteem without personal competence, move into technological jobs without having the requisite skills, or raise the level of public intelligence without knowledge of the powers and limits of Congress, the Constitution, or the Presidency.

In essay after essay, Lasch emphasizes the need for higher levels of education, of morals and civic values. Thus it appears not to be accidental that the last chapter addresses "The Soul of Man under Secularism" – the title, he informs us, is a play on Oscar Wilde's title, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891). Socialism had been Lasch's inspiration for most of his life. "In the heyday of the socialist movement its attraction for intellectuals cannot be adequately explained without considering the way it overlapped with the bohemian critique of the bourgeoisie . . . [and] the unremitting onslaught against bourgeois culture was far more lasting in its effect . . . than the attacks on capitalism." Lasch asserts that the solution of the "modern spiritual problem" is not in a return to obsolete forms of religion any more than in a secular world view, but only in living with our own proper lives as truly as did Christ in all its implications. In sum, Lasch finds that disillusionment is the characteristic form of modern pride, that nostalgia does not offer a way out, and that religion never provided unambiguous answers to ethical questions. Nor was it resistant to skepticism or forestalled speculation about the meaning of life. Ultimately, Lasch's bleak picture is not hopeless, if only because his description of doom and gloom, in its very sharp depictions, though not pointing to solutions, shows that the search for truth, along with a historical perspective, may well be the means for American society to save itself.

Still, Lasch's book, as a whole, is a searing indictment of American society and presents a sad outlook for American democracy. But it has a familiar ring, and it may be painting too dark a picture. For along with the inanities of our culture, ordinary people have a basic common sense

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and, in addition, American society has shown a remarkable resilience and ability to bounce back from severe crises. Nor does populism, which appears to be one of Lasch's prescriptions for our ills, seem to be adequate, for it has been, after all, a fundamental current of the country's life from the beginning. And Lasch's assertion that he remains a man of the left is not reassuring, since the left, at least in recent years, has provided the ideology about which he complains.

EDITH KURZWEIL

North and South

THE SOUTHERN TRADITION: THE ACHIEVEMENT AND LIMITATIONS OF AN AMERICAN CONSERVATISM. By Eugene D. Genovese. Harvard University Press. $22.50.

At once a bold tract for the time and a cogent summary interpretation of the complex relationship of the history of the American South to the history of the nation, Eugene Genovese's new book, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism,* expresses the hope that through attention to the "best" principles of the "republicanism" espoused by "southern conservatives," Americans may find a way to arrest the "current national drift into our ever deepening moral and political paralysis" and restore political, economic, and cultural order in our society. Genovese's expression of this hope is at times impassioned; it is as though he sees us in an apocalyptic either-or situation: either our salvation must come from a favorable response to Southern conservatism, or not at all. Indeed a superficial glance at *The Southern Tradition* (a brief book consisting of the 1993 Massey Lectures in American Civilization at Harvard University) might lead one to think that our leading Marxist historian – a native New Yorker, brought up in a working-class Brooklyn family, who now considers Georgia to be his adopted home – went up to the alma mater of Emerson, Thoreau, and Lowell to tell the Yankee intellectuals that, close upon a century-and-a-half since their forebears achieved a smashing military victory in the

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struggle their opponents called the War for Southern Independence, they must seriously contemplate coming to terms with the principles of the vanquished or themselves be lost. But it would seem closer to the truth to say that essentially Genovese went up to Cambridge to tell his audience that they must think about doing the same thing he has been doing since he became "fascinated with southern history" as an undergraduate at Brooklyn College: entertain the paradoxical possibility of seriously considering the positive worth of a society that had once associated the preservation of liberty with the preservation of a system of chattel slavery, and later, having been forcibly deprived of the right to own slaves, had insisted on economic and social policies that at the least substantially deprived the freed men of the benefits of emancipation and in many instances virtually re-enslaved them.

Yet to see *The Southern Tradition* as poised on such a simple historical irony belies its complexity. A rich distillation of the thinking of the South that is embodied in a series of remarkable studies – including not only his best-known works, *The World the Slaveholders Made* and *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made,* but also his joint work with Elizabeth Fox Genovese in *The Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* and a large study-in-progress called *The Mind of the Planting Class* – Genovese's most recent book has a more personal dimension than any he has heretofore written. It may be read as being, overtly so in moments and by implication throughout, the intellectual autobiography of a highly-gifted historian who has always understood – and understands even more keenly in the maturity of his career – that the character of the teller of the tale is an integral part of the tale. More than in his prior work, this is to say, *The Southern Tradition* is marked by Genovese's awareness of his identity as a self-conscious actor in the drama of the history of the South and its fateful connection with the history of the American Republic.

Concerned that his "sympathetic" and "respectful" reading of Southern history may suggest to "people who understand nothing" that he has himself become a Southern conservative, Genovese draws a distinction between being a Southerner and being a Southern partisan. If he has elected to make his home among a people who "across lines of race, class, and sex are as generous, gracious, courteous, decent – in a word, civilized – as any people it has ever been my privilege to get to know," he has, he says, yet remained an outsider. For that matter, he declares, not only has he not become "a member of the southern conservative camp," he has not become a conservative of any stripe. Having "come out of the Marxist Left," he remains committed to "a lifelong

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struggle for social justice against economic exploitation, racism, male supremacy, and the atomization of social life." In view of this insistence, it seems appropriate to read Genovese's treatment of the achievement and limitation of the Southern tradition as basically constituting the drama of a sympathetic insider's appraisal of the situation of the American left and a sympathetic outsider's appraisal of the situation of the American right, or we might say, particularly of its Southern wing. Or, to put it another way, it seems fitting to regard *The Southern Tradition* as the drama of the author's quarrel with himself about his role in contemporary American history.

The critique of the character of the left in this country through reference to the history of the South is of course nothing new in Genovese's writings. As he points out in *The Southern Tradition*, he began a long time ago to urge that in order to rescue itself from its association with totalitarianism, Stalinist or otherwise, the left might well turn to a constructive view of the history of the region of the United States that has most consistently exhibited a strong anti-capitalist bias. But, we detect, a new note of urgency informs this prescription in that his definition of Southern history now appears clearly to involve Genovese's need to define his own identity as a self-conscious actor in history. As an historian who, beguiled by the "Left's rosy view of human nature, never dreamed that the Soviet Union would suddenly collapse," he has come to feel that he has the obligation to answer "a few questions" about why he spent a good part of his life "in a political movement that piled up tens of millions of corpses to sustain a futile cause and hideous political regimes."

Although *The Southern Tradition* is not the place Genovese has chosen to meet this obligation in any precise way, we sense its burden in his heightened sensitivity to the fallibility of the tradition he offers as a corrective to the socialist movement. He is, to be sure, anxiously aware that the very source of Southern tradition, the historical culture of the white South, is disappearing in the "modernization" that is transforming the South. While "the transformation has much to recommend it, especially with respect to long overdue if incomplete justice for black people," it is exacting a price "northerners as well as southerners, blacks as well as whites, will rue having to pay and need not pay": a "neglect of, or contempt for, the history of Southern whites, without which some of the more distinct and noble features of American national life must remain incomprehensible."

The specific "noble features" of the national life – the noble ideals, Genovese would seem to mean – that are "incomprehensible" to most

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Americans as a result of the neglect or contempt of the white culture of the South are reflected in the political, economic, and cultural agenda that he describes as having descended from John C. Calhoun and other highly educated antebellum Southern writers and thinkers, to the Vanderbilt Agrarians – John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate – and thence to the latter-day disciples of the Agrarians, notably Richard Weaver and M. E. Bradford. This agenda includes

> opposition to finance capitalism, and more broadly, to the attempt to substitute the market for society itself; opposition to the radical individualism that is today sweeping America; [support] for broad property ownership, and a market economy subject to socially determined moral restraints; adherence to a Christian individualism that condemns personal license and demands submission to a moral consensus rooted in elementary piety; and an insistence that every people must develop its own genius, and must reject siren calls to an internationalism – or rather, a cosmopolitanism – that would eradicate local and national cultures and standards of personal conduct by reducing morals and all else to commodities.

But even as he appeals to the hope that "the deep anticapitalism of twentieth-century southern conservatives" indicates the possibility that the ideals of the "conservatism that has, from its origins, constituted America's most impressive native-born critique of our national development, of liberalism, and of the more disquieting features of the modern world" may once again become comprehensible, Genovese is haunted by the doubt that in reality effective opposition to capitalism in the South did not survive the defeat of the Confederacy, the "end of slavery" having destroyed the social relations that nurtured [the] critique of capitalism" in the South. As warmly as he endorses the best aspects of the anticapitalism of Tate, Weaver, and Bradford, especially its emphasis on the principle that genuine individual freedom is possible only in a society that values family, religion, and hierarchy, Genovese cannot say that this has done anything to prevent Southern conservatives in general from joining with conservatives elsewhere in the nation in subscribing to a "free-market liberalism the ideal of which shares much with the radical Left's version of egalitarianism," and, in professing to believe "in a level playing field and an attendant doctrine of equality," projects "hopes that are no less an invitation to disillusionment and despair than their counterparts in the Left's chimera of equality of outcome and ultimate condition." Genovese draws a vivid historical analogy:

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> The fall of the Confederacy drowned the hopes of southern conservatives for the construction of a viable noncapitalist social order, much as the disintegration of the Soviet Union – all pretenses and wishful thinking aside – has drowned the hopes of socialists. The critique of capitalism has lead southern conservatives to the impasse in which the Left now finds itself.

"World-historic events," Genovese adds, "compel a reassessment of first principles as well as political and social principles." But if such a reassessment must realistically begin with the admission of the failure of the critique of capitalism by both the American left and right, implying as it does the extinction of hope in the creation of a better world by either side, what motive will generate the reassessment? In the last chapter of *The Southern Tradition* ("Property and Power"), Genovese prophetically sees the motive arising out of faith in the creative use of historical experience, envisioning an extension of the republican principles of Southern conservatism in the creation of "a constitutional arrangement that protects private interests, including the right to inherit property, while it respects the ultimate power of the people, acting collectively, to establish proper limits on individual action." But does not Genovese qualify this prophetic hope by the text he cites for his faith in the conservative use of historical experience? This consists of a few lines Robert E. Lee set down not long before his death: "Providence is so slow . . . the life of humanity is so long, and that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave, and are thus discouraged. It is history that teaches us to hope." This was the final admonition from the leader of a "courageous, God-fearing, honorable people," who, as Genovese describes them in the Preface to *The Southern Tradition,* "rendered themselves complicit in slavery, segregation, and racism and ended up in defeat and degradation." It is "wrong," Genovese admonishes, "to obscure the genuinely tragic dimension of southern history." When he appeals to General Lee in the final moment of the drama of the quarrel with himself he records in *The Southern Tradition,* one has the feeling that Genovese is putting on the record his recognition that it would also be wrong to obscure the possibility that the history of a twentieth-century American historian who has dedicated himself both to writing the history of the American South and supporting the world-historic "struggle to restructure our social relations" may have its own tragic dimension.

LEWIS P. SIMPSON

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An Inspired Scholar

THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF ART: STYLE, ARTIST, AND SOCIETY. By Meyer Schapiro. George Braziller. $27.50.

Despite its rather daunting title, the most recent volume of Meyer Schapiro's selected papers is a delight. The nine essays, mostly written in the 1960s, are vivid testimonials to the eminent art historian's broad interests, his penetrating knowledge, and his ability to make illuminating connections. The catholicity of Schapiro's expertise is legendary – he is equally celebrated for his work in Early Christian, medieval, and modernist art, especially Impressionism – but even by the standard of his previous publications, the current collection is diverse, ranging from a semiotic analysis of conventions of painting structure from the Stone Age to the present, to meditations on concepts of form, content, and style, evaluations of Diderot, Fromentin, and Berenson as critics, and dissections of Heidegger's and Freud's efforts to write about art.

Schapiro has the inspired scholar's gift of questioning things that seem wholly accepted and thoroughly understood and making us look at them with fresh eyes. In "On Perfection, Coherence, and Unity in Form and Content," (1966) for example, he argues that aesthetic value often has little to do with meaning. We can admire and be moved by pictures whose subjects remain unintelligible or ambiguous. "Some of the greatest [works]," Schapiro writes, "are still problematic in meaning and continue to engage the ingenuity of iconographers. To assume that the forms would necessarily acquire another aspect if we knew what they represented or what their deeper content was originally is only a guess. . . . It is unlikely that Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* would change in artistic character if one of the alternative interpretations of its uncertain subject were adopted as certain."

Schapiro has, as well, the inspired art historian's ability to put a rich, scrupulously documented knowledge of context into the service of intense visual analysis, in a quest for the common thread that connects disparate elements. Those of us who studied with him at Columbia were convinced that he had read and remembered *everything*. His lectures were virtuoso performances, impeccably constructed and delivered without notes, impressive even in a department made up of such luminaries as Rudolf Wittkower and Julius S. Held, where brilliant lectures and significant scholarship were the norm. Schapiro aspired, it seemed from his lectures, to the impossible task of discovering how works of art from the

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past appeared to beholders of their own era, at the same time bringing to bear the full weight of his accumulated knowledge of subsequent history.

This ambition is manifest in the best of his writing. Evidence carefully marshalled from letters, contemporary accounts, newspapers, notebooks, novels, inventories, and all the rest of the myriad sources that responsible historians must sift and weigh, is used to confirm and corroborate things seen in paintings or sculptures. Unlike many of his younger colleagues, Schapiro never uses art to illustrate preconceived theory or ideology; his conclusions derive from strict observation, strengthened by research. He is well aware of the need to remain alert and critical, to avoid being seduced by a tidy theory, no matter how seemingly convincing the evidence. In "Style," (1962), for example, he cautions against attaching too much importance to apparent likenesses or unlikenesses in works from different disciplines. "The dominant outlook of a time – if it can be isolated," he writes, "does not affect all the arts in the same degree, nor are all the arts equally capable of expressing the same outlook. Special conditions within art are often strong enough to determine a deviant expression."

Another passage in this essay accurately illuminates Schapiro's approach:

> Historians . . . like thoughtful artists, have resorted to intuitive judgements, relying on direct experience of art. Building up an unsystematic, empirical knowledge of forms, expressions, affects, and qualities, they have tried to control these judgements by constant comparison of works and by reference to contemporary sources of information about the content of the art, assuming that the attitudes which govern the latter must also be projected in the style. The interpretation of Classical style is not founded simply on firsthand experience of Greek buildings and sculptures; it rests also on knowledge of Greek language, literature, religion, mythology, philosophy, and history, which provide an independent picture of the Greek world. But this picture is, in turn, refined and enriched by experience of the visual arts, and our insight is sharpened by knowledge of the very different arts of the neighboring peoples and of the result of attempts to copy the Greek models at later times under other conditions.

One of the most provocative studies in *Theory and Philosophy of Art* is a 1963 essay on the nineteenth-century painter-critic, Eugène Fromentin, not least because it reveals so much about Schapiro's values. He praises Fromentin for discussing only pictures that he had encountered

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directly and for being "the first writer to give to published criticism of the old masters the spontaneous personal character of this hitherto private, yet highly objective, discernment of art which must have been practiced by many artists." Particularly in his discussions of Rubens and Ruisdael, Fromentin makes his readers see that "everything in the work of art – the attitude toward the subject, the execution, palette, and forms – belongs then to the individual and is an expressive end as well as a means." Schapiro reminds us that the "unity of sensation and feeling" basic to Fromentin's critical method was also basic to imaginative literature of the period, and that the writer-painter commands our attention, in part, because he was "among the first to introduce into art criticism the standards of observation and of expression of sentiment developed by the French novelists and poets – the requirement of a direct encounter with the object, nuanced statement of feeling, and a rapid, flexible prose with a syntax and rich sensory language that could evoke the observed and the observer together, without dissolving the object in the sensation or mood . . . Painters also shared this aim."

Schapiro's development of this idea exemplifies the kind of informed synthesis that had us struggling to take *complete* notes, during his Columbia lectures. "Since the visual was the highest example of direct experience of the outer world and in this directness was affirmed the free activity of the self, modern painting took on a new charm for the poet as an art in which the subjective and the external were fused."

Perhaps the most entertaining essays in *Theory and Philosophy of Art* are those devoted to Freud's and Heidegger's attempts to deal with works of art. Quite simply Schapiro elegantly and politely demonstrates that where visual art is concerned, the opinions (and methodology) of these acclaimed thinkers was wholly, devastatingly *wrong*. The piece on Freud departs from the analyst's famous essay, *A Childhood Reminiscence of Leonardo da Vinci* – the one that begins with Leonardo's remembered childhood dream about a vulture, speculates on the illegitimate young man's relationship with his parents, and sees the apparent fusion of Mary and her mother in the Louvre's *Virgin and Child with St. Anne,* (1510) and their similar appearance, despite Mary's having been born, miraculously, in St. Anne's old age, as manifestations of the personality projected from the evidence of the dream. Further confirmation came from the "discovery," soon after the publication of Freud's essay, by one of his disciples of a disguised image of a vulture in the Virgin's robe. Schapiro neatly demolishes Freud's construction by presenting facts: the bird mentioned in Leonardo's memoir – "nibbio" in Italian – is a kite, not a vulture; there is ample art historical and theological precedent for the

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compressed, coeval image of Mary and her mother; recently studied documents suggested that Leonardo was a recognized, valued member of his father's household, and so on, all supported with material about the traditional attributes of both kite and vulture, about the history of representing the Virgin and St. Anne, and more.

The essay on Heidegger is delicious – compressed, ironic, thought-provoking. Here the point of departure is the philosopher's interpretation of a van Gogh painting of a pair of worn, laced shoes, a part, Schapiro tells us, of Heidegger's effort to distinguish "three modes of being: of useful artifacts, of natural things, and of works of art." Heidegger identifies the empty shoes in the picture as belonging to an old peasant woman whose history can be intuited, in her absence, from these intimate articles of clothing: "Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field."

But, Schapiro asks, to which of van Gogh's eight paintings of old shoes exhibited at the time the essay was written does Heidegger refer? Meticulous scholar that he is, Schapiro asked Heidegger and received a precise reply. Unfortunately, Schapiro informs us, neither from the painting Heidegger identified "nor from any of the others, could one properly say that a painting of shoes by van Gogh expresses the being or essence of a peasant woman's shoe and her relation to nature and work. They are the shoes of the artist, by that time a man of the town and city." Schapiro, of course, is fully armed with all the necessary documentation to support his assertion of Heidegger's factual error. What is more interesting is his objection to both the philosopher's method and his interpretation: "He has experienced both too little and too much in his contact with the work."

Heidegger, Schapiro asserts, substituted projection for close attention to the work of art. But even if van Gogh had painted a picture of a peasant woman's shoes, the philosopher's belief that he had uncovered "the being of the shoes" in that picture would still be unfounded, since, Schapiro says, there is "nothing in Heidegger's fanciful description of the shoes pictured by van Gogh that could not have been imagined in looking at a real pair of peasant shoes." Heidegger ignores both the particularities of the painting as a painting and "the artist's presence in the work – the personal and physiognomic in the shoes that made them so persistent and absorbing a subject for the artist (not to speak of the intimate connection with the specific tones, forms, and brush-made surface of the picture as a painted work)."

Schapiro himself, as these collected essays make clear, is always alert

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to the interplay of the personal and the contextual, the willed and the unavoidable, the physical and – for lack of a better word – the spiritual. He is both passionate about his subjects and eminently reasonable. In *Theory and Philosophy of Art,* we see him checking informed conjecture against the verifiable, weighing probability against fact, and arriving at highly personal, intuitive, yet convincing interpretations. Only one essay in the collection, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," (1969) seems less than individual, at least in its beginning, a generic acknowledgment of the ideas of Derrida and company: "My theme is the non-mimetic elements of the image-sign and their role in constituting the sign."

The essay examines a fundamental element of image-making: the support – its nature, its expanse, its confines, its very texture. Schapiro reminds us that though we generally assume that a sheet of paper or a canvas is rectangular, clearly defined, and smooth, this is a relatively modern convention that "corresponds to nothing in nature or mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up in a vague unbounded void." He tracks the changing relation of image to field through time, making provocative observations almost as asides, along the way. "The new smoothness and closure," he says, "made possible the later transparency of the picture plane without which the representation of three-dimensional space would not have been successful."

The essay addresses orthodox semiotic questions of the effect of orientation and "handedness" – right or left – on perception, as well as issues of the relationship of image to edge: is the edge a defining boundary or an interruption of a continuous expanse? But what really interests Schapiro is how the nearly irreduceable ground and frame can change from unavoidable necessities into active components that affect the meaning and the expressive sense of other elements. This transformation, when other aspects of the picture are freed from service to representation, seems to Schapiro to form the raw material of abstract art, or as he puts it in correct semiotic-speak: "the far-reaching conversion of these non-mimetic elements into positive representations (whose) functions in representation in turn lead to new functions of expression and constructive order in later non-mimetic art."

The tone and language are atypical. Is the essay simply a demonstration that a senior, established scholar can speak the most *au courant* of academic languages? Perhaps. But the essay ends with a discussion of Mondrian and Degas that abandons familiar semiotic locutions for the fresh, trenchant synthesis that we expect of Schapiro. Discussing Mondrian's unpredictably proportioned rectangles and Degas's abruptly cropped

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figures, Schapiro comments that in both, "we seem to behold only a small part of an infinitely extended structure; the pattern of the rest is not deducible from the fragmentary sample which is an odd and in some respects ambiguous segment and yet possesses a striking balance and coherence. In this construction one can see not only the artist's ideal of order and scrupulous precision, but also a model of one aspect of contemporary thought: the conception of the world as law-bound in the relation of simple elementary components, yet open, unbounded and contingent as a whole." That last phrase might summarize Schapiro's conception of the nature of art itself.

KAREN WILKIN

Unsentimental Journeys

IMPERIUM. By Ryszard Kapuscinski. Translated from the Polish by Klara Glowczewska. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.00.
THE IMPOSSIBLE COUNTRY: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAST DAYS OF YUGOSLAVIA. By Brian Hall. David R. Godine. $23.95.
BIOGRAFI: A TRAVELER'S TALE. By Lloyd Jones. A Harvest Original/ Harcourt Brace. $10.95.

Macabre odysseys through three countries for which the term "dysfunctional" might have been invented illuminate the Dantesque shades still lingering where paradise was promised but dystopia was delivered.

Of all the locales the Iron Curtain kept hidden, Albania is perhaps the one over which the harshest shadow of obscurity looms, a country recognized, if at all, for its tradition of centuries-long blood feuds and for having endured Europe's most repressive and paranoid Stalinist regime. For decades, lawyers, Western business practices, religion, foreign travel, and beards were forbidden, and after 1972, listening to foreign radio or television became a capital offense. A news blackout in both directions, coupled with a travel ban and rigid ideological controls over all realms of culture, further isolated this small, impoverished country. As the New Zealand novelist Lloyd Jones recounts it in *Biografi*, he first became intrigued by distant Albania through an uncle's neighbor who received the Voice of Tirana on his shortwave radio. After reading about a popular revolt in Albania and the March 1991 exodus of 20,000 Albanians

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who left the country clinging to the sides of overloaded ships, he lit off to investigate these defections firsthand, arriving shortly after the mass exodus of 150,000 Albanians to Greece. What on earth was everyone trying to flee?

To Jones, Albania had always seemed like "the proverbial room at the top of the stairs that you never went into for fear of what you might find." His travels more than confirmed his fears. Moving seamlessly through the realms of detective story, travelogue, and fiction, Jones gives no hint of where his documentary-style reporting ends and his imagination takes flight. Yet, with facts even close to what he's chronicled, one hardly needs to resort to fiction. Entering the port of Durres was, for Jones, an eerie introduction to Albania, "like being in Dr. Who's time capsule." As his boat neared the harbor, "the Albanians on board fell silent; the crowd standing onshore in the mud, rain, and cold, staring out through barbed wire, also seemed to have been rendered mute." Albanians, Jones concluded, are probably unaccustomed to welcoming back their own. A fellow traveller asks him why he wanted to visit this country. "Perhaps you are a spy? In Albania," he tells Jones, "there is hardly anyone who isn't a spy."

It was under Enver Hoxha, Albania's "Great Leader" from 1944 to 1985, that Albania declared itself the first atheist state, although Hoxha himself was, according to some Albanians, a religion, godlike if not God. "At my office," one man recounts, "no one was brave enough to even mention his death. Imagine if we said the Emperor was dead and he turned out not to be?" When Hoxha's death was finally announced over the radio, some "cried with grief. Others cried because they thought it dangerous not to. Some turned white believing something catastrophic would happen. The crops would shrivel and die. The seas would rise. They would be obliged to walk on stilts."

Dictators (and other cautious heads of state) have often employed doubles as foils for assassination attempts at public gatherings. (Hoxha's predecessor, King Zog, morbidly preoccupied with staying alive, survived fifty-five such attempts). One afternoon, while performing surgery, Petar Shapallo, a rural Albanian dentist the same size and age as Hoxha, was abducted by government agents. Although the dentist and the dictator had "perfect matching shadows" and uncannily similar smiles "designed to reassure," a highly-skilled entourage set to work on further perfecting his resemblance to the dictator. "Once satisfied that the reflection could not be improved, he (Hoxha) had Shapallo's family killed," Jones writes. "Next to go were the surgeons, hairdressers, and tailors. They were in the bus that toppled over the cliffs which spill down to Dhermi on the Adriatic Coast."

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Sequestered for twenty years, Shapallo was outfitted with Chinese underclothing, a "cap like Enver's" and a few gray-flannel suits for public outings. "Otherwise in private he lived in a dressing gown and sandals to prevent another identity from emerging through a second change of clothing." When the dictator was sick or dying, "a sort of cheerful emaciation was expected of Shapallo." Following Hoxha's death, his double became a man "who placed each foot delicately, as if trying to tiptoe away from his shadow." Accustomed to "soft living," Shapallo foraged to stay alive, subsisting on chestnuts and olives.

Jones's search for Shapallo, whom he had read about in an obscure magazine, leads him through Albania's destitute countryside to the coastal marshland where Shapallo had last been seen years before. Together, this unlikely duo visit Topojani on the Macedonian border where Shapallo had practiced dentistry. Potatoes are the only food around; everyone appears stunted and malnourished. Boys of twelve and thirteen stood no taller than Jones's waist. People tell him about a woman "who remembers the Serbs" from 1912 when they slaughtered five hundred and twenty people there. "She will tell you, all her life she has starved."

The book derives its title from the all-important *biografi*, Albania's warped version of a curriculum vitae, security dossiers bulging with misinformation that were updated yearly, kept and used against Albania's citizens. Jones watches with quiet horror as people line up in the House of Biografi, presenting the facts of their lives "as though they are little more than damaged houseware, bits of crockery . . . The registrar said between four and five thousand people with 'bad biografi' were penalized or jailed every year. He invited me to multiply that number by forty-five years."

Jones's Albanian shipmate did not exaggerate when he whispered, "My friend, you cannot imagine."

While the unimaginable has become a daily reality in the former Yugoslavia, reporting has rarely elucidated the beginnings of this country's implosion into war as lucidly as the young American journalist Brian Hall's in *The Impossible Country*. Bosnia, *The New York Times* columnist Russell Baker has observed, "is the Marcel Proust of news stories. Throw in Balzac, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky too. You can read for weeks, years, generations, without getting a grip on Bosnia." Hall would doubtless agree. Arriving in Yugoslavia a week after the May 1991 massacre at Borovo Selo, the start of the current period of civil war, Hall was one of the last foreign journalists to travel unimpeded through the region. Intellectuals there lecture to Hall (whose last book, *Stealing from a Deep*

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Place, covered South-Eastern Europe) that "the truth" about Yugoslavia is not only knowable, but blatantly obvious. Yet Hall insists he's never been in a country where the truth was more intrinsically complex, more fundamentally unknowable. "If you disagreed, you had a motive. Perhaps you were someone's agent . . . duped by the other side. You were, they would shrug, 'a Western sheep among the Balkan wolves'." Hall's telling quotes and eye for detail make one realize how much suffering the people in this land endured even before the outbreak of war:

> So many people in Yugoslavia had been tortured at one time or another, and every one I had met, Serb, Croat, Muslim, Albanian, had been seized with the same expression. The face set slowly, like a pudding congealing, and a flush rose, and the eyes went through an extraordinary transformation; they locked on to yours, and deepened, and turned inward, trance-like, as tears welled up around the edges of a brutal clamping-down of the will. It was a terribly intimate look, a defenseless, childlike look. . . . Perhaps this was how you looked at your torturer . . . as he scanned your face to see how you would respond to . . . this.

Hall discovers outlandish xenophobic tales that have persisted for nearly two thousand years, a national insecurity in the face of "all things Western" linked to Europe-envy, and a derision for all things tarred by association with "Balkan." Muslims, he notes, "were desperate to assure Europe that they were as Western as the next Balkan nation; but any attempt to stress their unique culture made them look Eastern. Like it or not, their culture was Turkish." And Albanians within Yugoslavia's borders disgusted every other ethnic group:

> Serbs despised the Croats, but they were haunted by the Albanians. Croats were their twins who had gone bad, the unsettling image in the mirror of what the Serbs might have become had not God, in his grace, granted them their Serbness. The Albanians were bogeymen . . . Even people who managed to be rational about the Croats could not speak of the Albanians without sounding as though their skin was crawling.

Yugoslavia, Hall observes, "had always specialized in an absurd, half-assed sort of harassment, which appeared to spring from a knee-jerk repression response unbacked by the will to carry through. If Dubcek represented 'Communism with a human face,' Titoism was Communism in

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a fright wig." While Hall finds it "superbly indicative" of Yugoslavia that something as easily verifiable as where Tito's nickname came from has never been verified, he seems most astonished that Yugoslavia managed to stay cobbled together for eleven years after Tito's death in 1980.

The intrepid Ryszard Kapuscinski, author of *Shah of Shahs, The Emperor,* and *Soccer Wars,* is renowned for his extraordinary – some call it magical – coverage of civil wars, third world decolonization, and revolutions in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, where he worked as a foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency. Asked why he's repeatedly risked his life to get his stories, he has responded: "I wouldn't subject myself to these dangers if I didn't feel that there was something overwhelmingly important – about history, about ourselves – to get across. This is more than journalism." He unapologetically admits he's neither a specialist, a Kremlinologist, nor a Sovietologist, modestly adding that his actual familiarity with the Imperium was "therefore negligible, haphazard, superficial." But the workings of the Kremlin are, it would appear, of little interest to this writer who has always pried himself loose from the journalistic pack to search for stories in "the bush," the ignored geographical peripheries.

In the spring of 1989, when Kapuscinski began his two years of extended journeys through the disintegrating Soviet empire, he sensed the world was entering "a period of great metamorphosis, of a transformation so profound and fundamental that it would not bypass anyone . . . certainly not the last imperium on earth – the Soviet Union . . . an extraordinary, fascinating moment, fraught with promise, when this spirit of the times, dozing pitifully and apathetically, like a huge wet bird on a branch, suddenly . . . and unexpectedly takes off in bold and joyful flight."

Imperium opens with Kapuscinski's ghoulish recollections of his first encounter with the Imperium during the "frosty, icy hell" of the winter of 1939-1940 in Pinsk, on Poland's eastern frontier. Among his memories are the incomprehension and dread he felt at age seven as he watched refugees in panicked flight carrying teakettles and pots, his school class mysteriously dwindling by half, his skull splitting from pain as he learns to smoke in order to ease the "all-consuming, gnawing sense of hunger," his mother making pancakes from the tiny bit of remaining flour, then turning away so as not to watch her children eat. One night, Red Army men pound at his family's windows and door so insistently "that it seems at any moment the ceiling will cave in," then barge into their house with lightning speed "as if enraged wolves were catching them." The NKVD bring his classmates white shirts and red scarves to wear on

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"important holidays"; his teacher "in a frightened and sad voice" cowers and instructs his charges to obey this order. Crouching in the bushes with friends, he observes a deportation. He listens in terror to the moans and cries as four NKVD men, with icy detachment, lock and secure the heavy doors with wire, then busy themselves counting and writing down all the petty details.

As Kapuscinski trudges through his forty-thousand-mile journey from the edge of Afghanistan, to far-eastern Siberia, into the Arctic Circle, and through Central Asia, he will revisit these childhood themes – terror, starvation, incarceration, and the psychotic attention paid in a totalitarian regime to minutiae. His running commentary on man-made boundaries and barbed wire includes a madcap calculation of the thousands of kilometers of wire it must have taken to fence in Russian's twenty-two million miles of borders, to say nothing of the wire used to fence in the Gulag Archipelago. This, Kapuscinski explains, is why "in the shops of Smolensk or Omsk, one can buy neither a hoe nor a hammer, never mind a knife or a spoon." The metals have all been used up in the manufacture of those endless reams of barbed wire. Kapuscinski envisions

> thousands of commissions and control teams dispatched across the entire territory of the Imperium to make certain that everything is properly enclosed, so that fences are high and thick enough, so meticulously entangled and woven that even a mouse cannot squeeze through. . . . Instead of building houses and hospitals, instead of repairing the continually failing sewage and electrical systems, people were for years occupied . . . with the internal and external, local and national, wiring of the Imperium.

Traveling on the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1958, he thinks, "It is safe to assume that half of those who have ever walked upon our planet and lost their lives in the field of glory gave up the ghost in battles begun over a question of borders." The "thorny, rapacious" barrier of barbed wire stretching across Russia's myriad borders seems to him "an absurd and surreal idea, for who would forge his way through here?" The message behind these endless walls of wire is clear: No escape. You have entered a world "of deadly seriousness, orders and obedience. Learn to listen, learn humility, learn to occupy the least amount of space possible. Best mind your own business. Best be silent. Best not ask questions," especially when the very inflection of a sentence could foreshadow a sinister fate. Kapuscinski posits that a national muteness has

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arisen from obeying these unspoken injunctions. Interrogative language, appropriated by the police, so frequently concealed lethal charges that the art of formulating questions, by association, became an extinct art.

During his travels in the Imperium, Kapuscinski notices that the first step people use to establish contact is a mutual determination of each other's nationality, rather than, say, a discussion of crops or the weather. Yet, despite the Russian peoples' ceaseless forced migrations, displacements, and wanderings, a foreigner, he posits, will nevertheless be struck by the "similarity between or the uniformity of human types rather than the distinctiveness of Homo Sovieticus."

One of the most extraordinary moments in this riveting scrapbook of impressions involves Kapuscinski's explanation of the Great Famine of the 1930s, during which ten million peasants died. Stalin's brutal attempt to collectivize agriculture by starving some thirty million peasants into obedience (and ten million to death) "brought such a terrible curse that this agricultural land has not recovered to this day . . . The land and the peasants retaliated the only way they were able against those who had conquered them. The earth stopped giving birth, and the peasants lost their love of working the land. It was a terrible, but a just, revenge."

Kapuscinski pays a grim visit to Kolyma in northeastern Siberia, a frozen desert reached by a railway line on which "for twenty-five years, nonstop, living human skeletons are transported." He graphically conjures up the squalor and misery of this "other world" where nature "pals it up with the executioner . . . serves the criminals, grovels before them always slipping them new instruments of torture – biting cold, icy winds, banks of snow a story high, enormous, impassable cold deserts." Surveying the rotting remains of the camp world – its shabby poverty, its clumsy, careless provisionality, Kapuscinski observes:

> It is a world stitched together from patches and rags, nailed together with rusted nails driven in with an ordinary ax, tied together with a burlap rope, secured with a piece of old wire. If one wanted to erase evidence of the crime, nothing here would need to be broken apart, dismantled, broken up. Half of the gulag archipelago has already sunk into the mire.

Jones, Hall, and Kapuscinski end their journeys with heavy hearts. In a postscript, Hall provides a depressing update on the struggles of the people we get to know, and care about, in his book. Jones, in an interview, later claims that the best thing about Albania was leaving it behind. Kolyma's rotting watchtowers and lifeless emptiness compel Ka-

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puscinski to reflect how remote from love, which creates new life, are the remains of what he has seen: "Such a great part of human experience, the most difficult and painful, passes leaving no trace. If one were to collect the energy of suffering emitted by the millions of people here and transform it into the power of creation, one could turn our planet into a flowering garden."

SUSAN MIRON

The Poetry of Ideas

THE LAST PURITAN: A MEMOIR IN THE FORM OF A NOVEL. VOL. 4 OF THE WORKS OF GEORGE SANTAYANA. Edited by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. Introduction by Irving Singer. MIT Press. $50.00.

"Platonist" is the usual term with which sophisticated readers keep Santayana at bay. But Santayana is a much more challenging figure than this tag suggests, challenging not only to our usual pieties about liberal intellectual practice but also to the American social and cultural life to which, as a Spanish-born "American" with a distinctly Catholic, albeit atheist sensibility, he was never comfortably reconciled. He is a complicated man and a complicated thinker, and we are still coming to terms, slowly, with his intellectual legacy. And for the record, he considered Plato a great poet and a rotten cosmologist.

The publication of MIT Press's fourth volume in the ongoing series *The Works of George Santayana* deserves, in this light, to be celebrated as something of an event. *The Last Puritan,* subtitled "A Memoir in the Form of a Novel," is an important part of Santayana's life work: his only novel, and his most sustained effort (alongside the poems and dialogues) to render the life of the mind as a part of the dramatic texture of being human. Reviewing the novel when it first appeared, John Dewey commented that "to me this volume stands above his other writings," suggesting that Santayana's "peculiar artistic sensitiveness is to character, so that in this novel his poetic gifts have freer play than when he is writing the poetry of ideas."

The "poetry of ideas" is an apt characterization, and that Dewey should find Santayana's other writings, by contrast, "sometimes rigid" in form and somewhat "soft and over-fluid" in substance brings into focus

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the relevant tension between these two very differently inflected anti-foundationalists. "Soft and over-fluid" sounds like an anxiety-ridden assessment of something fundamentally challenging to Dewey's own expectations of what would apparently be "hard" and "solid" (if still formally supple) philosophizing. Though Santayana's philosophical project would diverge in important ways from pragmatism as developed under James, Dewey, Mead, and others, his effort to combine a naturalistic materialism with a kind of spiritual concern for creatures and things derives from a decidedly pragmatic effort to locate the origins of higher impulses in contingent contexts or environments, not in order to debase or expose the higher impulses but to realize and develop them more honestly. This is a good deal closer to Dewey's own formulations in books like *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature* than Dewey was ever willing (or able) to admit.

Published in 1935 to enthusiastic reviews, *The Last Puritan* was immediately popular. It was a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, and was the number-one bestseller in the United States for three-and-a-half months. Indeed, it is a very readable book. Though Santayana is, as he admits in a letter, incapable of writing a believable love scene, he traces the intellectual, moral, and emotional development of his hero, Oliver Alden, with sensitive insight and wit. His narrator, never so self-assured as Fielding's, so warm as Dickens's, so smoothly urbane as Henry James's, or so verbally operatic as Joyce's or Woolf's, is still capable of a winning irony, just enough to forgive other infelicities of narrative technique. Many of the best moments come in what might be considered inexcusable digressions: on Whitman, on college athletics (football and sculling), on Homer, on Oxford, on Harvard, on Eton, on Plato, on *Hamlet*. These superfluities of description and speculation are never so long that the thread of the story is lost, but they are long enough, and frequent enough, to point out Santayana's narrative limitations.

But the loosely digressive style of the book serves Santayana's larger interests as well. This is a philosophical novel, in which characters embody larger philosophical tendencies and are frequently made to express those tendencies as they become manifest in particular situations. Fortunately, the novel doesn't attempt to explain the intricate mysteries of Santayana's notion of essences, which he was working out before, during, and after the writing of *The Last Puritan*. Rather, characters experience their worlds from the more generalized point of view of their moral and religious temperaments. Though there is some discussion of philosophers and other writers in the background, it surfaces only as characters grapple with events in their own lives. For Santayana, to write

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a philosophical novel is not to traffic in abstract ideas: it is to dramatize the ways in which ideas animate human lives.

It is perhaps inevitable, given his sense of the intimate relation between ideas and lived experience, that Santayana's own life should figure somehow into the novel. Horace Kallen once commented that whereas the autobiography is "a shield and deception really," the novel, because it is "disguised," is "far more authentic" as a personal document. The novel's itinerary loosely follows that of Santayana's own life: Oliver's childhood in late nineteenth-century Boston, contemporary with his cousin Mario Van de Weyer's European upbringing, their mutual time at Harvard a little after the turn of the century, then in London and Oxford before and during the First World War, even a brief view of Paris after the war. As the Introduction and Notes usefully point out, most of the characters and many of the events have analogues in Santayana's own life, just as many of the passages in the novel have relevant companion passages in the autobiography.

The most controversial biographical subtext is a series of veiled and quasi-veiled references to homosexuality. Irving Singer is right, I think, in his Introduction, to insist that *The Last Puritan* is not a specifically homosexual novel. It clearly involves what Santayana called "erotic friendships," particularly between Oliver and the lower-class British captain of his father's yacht, Jim Darnley, as well as between Oliver and his cousin Mario, grafted (unlike the pure New England Oliver) from Italian and New York city stock. Both Jim and Mario take heed of their physical natures, and together they have a profound if incomplete impact on Oliver, revealing to him the limitations of his Puritan background. Warned by Irwin Edman that readers might begin to question Santayana's own psycho-sexual history, Santayana complained to Daniel Cory that this sort of thing could only interfere with a fair reading of the book. Homosexuality is sure to be the focus of much interest for readers of the novel, especially in light of John McCormick's 1987 biography, but what is really striking is how simply and plainly Santayana deals with these erotic friendships *as* erotic friendships. Singer's introduction provides an excellent guide to Santayana's highly unconventional conception of love and eroticism.

Of course, erotic friendships have as little place in Oliver's sensibility as other forms of unregulated pleasure. Oliver is the last puritan, or the ultimate puritan as Singer points out, because he has recognized the inadequacy of his Puritan world view and so proceeds, in the best Puritan fashion, to rid himself of it. It is a remarkable double-bind: the harder he tries to release himself from his Puritan past, the more he entangles him-

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self in it. Oliver is a tragic hero, marvelously capable of seeing his world's and his own limitations, their failure to live up to an ideal of the good, but incapable of delivering himself from the disabling grip of his conscience, largely because so pathetically trained in the arts of social being. At the heart of Santayana's critique is the individual moral will, the isolated conscience, for which the last duty becomes a willed release from the fortress of the will. As Oliver tries to fit himself to the world through a conventional romantic pattern – marriage with one of two women both so idealized that he never has the least insight into their inner lives – it becomes clear that his admirable moral energy has made him unfit to live.

Santayana always felt that while Americans will argue with great moral fervor for ideals like freedom, they too often have no conception of what freedom can be good for, what to make of, or with, it. As he once wrote, "in a country where all men are free, every man finds that what most matters has been settled for him beforehand." Oliver has seen through the game but has none of the facilities that would allow him to experience his knowledge as a release. The only redeeming moments in *The Last Puritan* are moments of fugitive pleasure: either in the physical presence of Jim Darnley or in the company of nature, whose radical otherness Oliver always finds comforting, perhaps because it makes no demands on his moral will. These are moments when Oliver's spiritual nature is not so much abandoned as brought into fleeting contact with compelling, even exciting physical realities. Then, too, there is the relief of Santayana's finely honed irony, reminding us of his often avowed preference for irony over truth, or irony in the face of truth, the ability to laugh at and in so doing acknowledge our human limitations, instead of compounding those limitations with an arrogant and mystified sense of our intellectual and spiritual worth.

The editors, Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. and William G. Holzberger, have done a fine job in producing this volume, which is a critical edition of the text with a full textual apparatus. Readers will find the Introduction, Notes to the Text, and even the Textual Commentary well organized and informative. Critical editions are by nature hybrid creatures, and there will probably be something here for everyone to pick at, but the editors know their business and perform it well. A case can be made to have proceeded differently in the Prologue, where the most substantial textual problem in the volume occurs, but the editors' reasoning is certainly plausible, and the text we have has the virtue of being pretty much the text we've always had. Still, the rejected text, which Santayana was forced to rewrite due apparently to a printer's mistake, is much too dif-

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ficult to locate in the apparatus, which becomes strangely bloated in the treatment of this passage. The rejected text, which included the first description of Mario's mother, is worth seeking out, especially since it has never before appeared in print.

"Human nature," Santayana writes in this passage, "is engaged in an elaborate suicide. To be simple, sane, and humble is to be a blackleg in the great trades union of strivers and busybodies who are sworn to make an artificial organism of everything. Now you, Vanny, dare to live, no matter on what level, as if living were the most natural thing in the world." The "strivers and busybodies" effectively impose a model of identity that places a premium on an isolating and morally aggrandizing commitment to duty and work, whereas Jim Darnley, Mario (Vanny) Van de Weyer, and Oliver Alden, the latter in aspiration but not, sadly, in actual fact, reflect an alternative model of identity, one that seeks to open the self to less constrained and compulsory qualities of experience. *The Last Puritan* is full of lessons on the trials and triumphs – alas, mostly the former – of daring to live "as if living were the most natural thing in the world," and this critical edition provides a rich and definitive textual environment in which to learn them.

JONATHAN LEVIN

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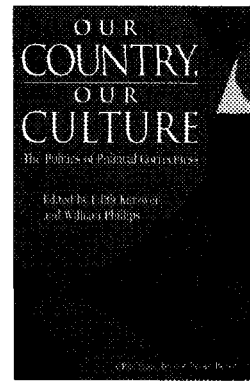

edited by Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips

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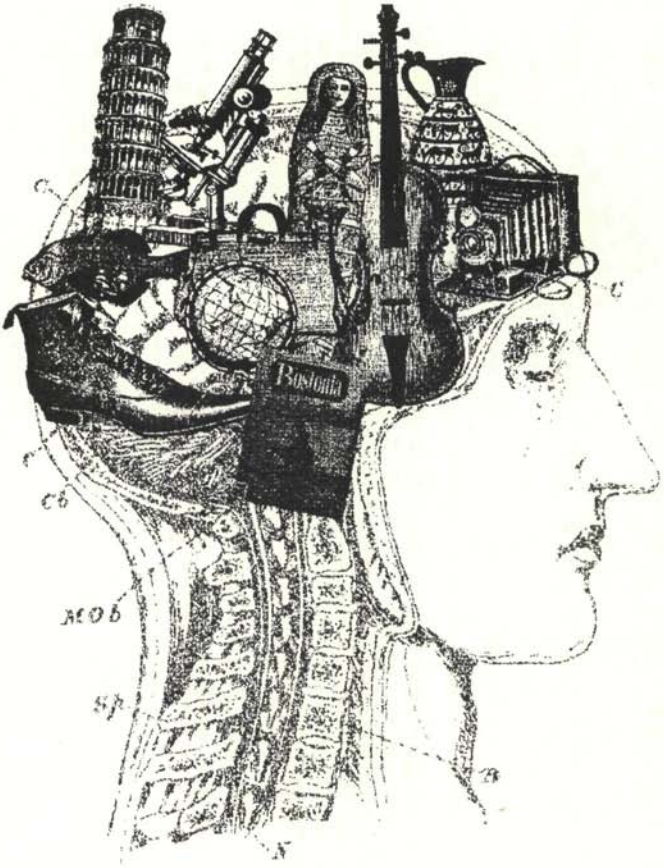

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